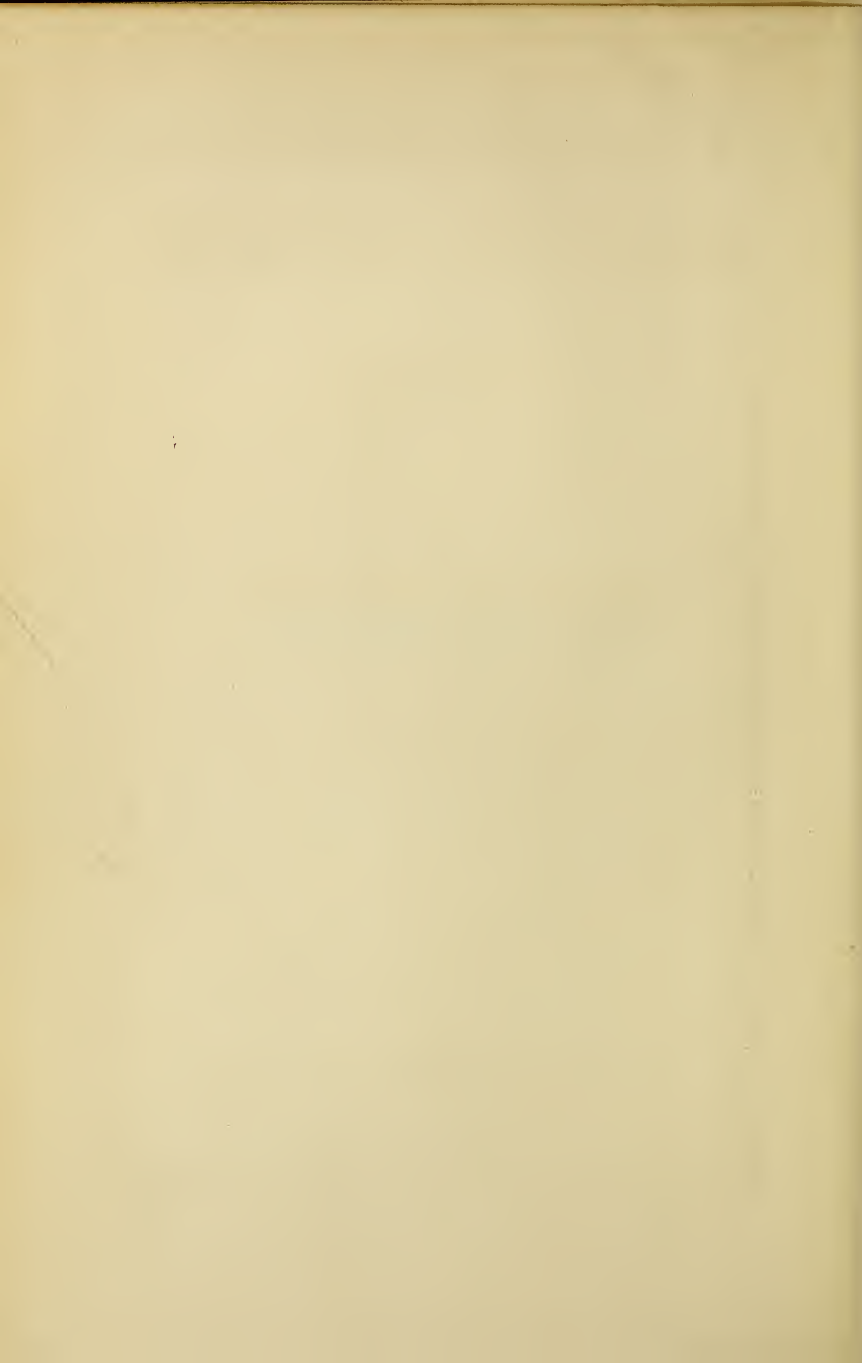




AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

DOCTOR BRYSON



DOCTOR BRYSON

A NOVEL

BY

FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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MY SISTER, GERTRUDE



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CHAPTER I

THE receiving-room of the Laffin College for the Eye and Ear is very large and its day is long. The day, indeed, may be said to begin at eleven o'clock night, when, the janitor arriving, followed by a brigade of scrub-women, turns on the incandescent bulbs hot yet from the work of the evening, and the big room and its fellows are beaten, scrubbed, cleansed, and disinfected for the work of the new day.

In the morning at one o'clock the preparations are complete and the receiving-room naps. At three o'clock and at four the watchman looks through it; at six the porter throws open the wide windows and the cool air of the lake, uncontaminated yet by the traffic of the street, rushes in. At seven students begin to arrive; at eight there are assistants in the laboratories; at nine professors are seen among the lockers; half an hour later the big doors opening upon the elevators are closed to exclude stragglers; at ten the clinics begin.

The main doors open then for all day—open to a mass of human misery, for the clinic of the Laffin College for the Eye and Ear is the largest in the world. They open, the big doors, not so much to the blind—few of the blind pass them—they open to those that are

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going blind. Indeed, to be blind is not so much; it is the going blind that costs.

In Chicago, where nothing comes by chance, everything seems to; but it is not to luck nor to fortuity that the Laflin College owes its extraordinary clinic. When Bryson became a factor in the councils of the College the clinic was no more than a feature of the catalogue; an advantage that the school was reputed to enjoy. Situated in the very heart of the most typical of the great cities of America, less than two minutes' walk from all surface terminals and within the loop of the elevated systems, the Laflin College for the Eye and Ear enjoys—such was the word, enjoys—through its exceptional advantage of location the most important adjunct of a medical institution, viz., a large clinic. So said the catalogue.

Yet the “viz., a large clinic,” when Doctor Bryson was offered the position of surgeon-in-chief for the Eye at the Laflin College, was like many catalogue announcements, viz., a large fiction. The large receiving-room was there, the large medical staff was there, the large body of students was there, but the misery—there was no misery. The problem was to get the misery.

“While I am sensible of the honor,” said Henry Elwood Bryson, M.D., and fellow of many societies, as he stood afterward paged in the Laflin catalogue, “while I am very sensible of the honor,” he repeated to the trustees when offered the highest position at their disposal, “there are matters of policy to be considered that should be discussed rather frankly before I venture on accepting it.”

The most vital of these matters related to the clinic.

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Doctor Bryson made known his position on this definitely and at once. "If I take the surgery of the eye," he said in effect, "it must be on this condition—that no student of the institution be permitted to touch the eye of a clinic patient. Operations upon the eye, however slight, must be performed by the surgeons and the assistant surgeons of the staff, and by them alone."

The position was radical. It must be considered that the courses at the Laflin institution are post-graduate: that every student is already a doctor of medicine. "What will become of our classes?" asked the trustees, bewildered; "they will quit school." Doctor Bryson was firm. "I don't want any student operating on my eye," he contended; "you, gentlemen, wouldn't want one cutting into yours. Let the poor be assured that there will be no experimenting in their distress and we can work up a clinic here that will beat Vienna."

The trustees cautiously misgave; Bryson stood out. He was looked on as the coming man on this side; they really wanted him to take the chair; moreover, the bait he cast in his talk was attractive. It can be made to beat Vienna, Doctor Bryson had said. To beat Vienna, they well knew, would be to beat the world. How could a board of Chicago trustees resist an attempt that promised in any respect to beat the world? So say you, said they at last, so let it be; so it was. Doctor Bryson accepted their chair. The new word went forth; the clinic grew marvelously.

How could it be otherwise? The poor heard they were no longer to be butchered to make a student holiday. They came, suspicious, for treatment; they went

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away reassured. The word passed; poverty also has its freemasonry—what binds closer than common ties of distress? More came, and more, until soon at the Laffin College there was misery to spare. Nor was a student lost, for the student must follow the clinic; he cannot lead it. And the clinic grew; grew until the smooth, prosperous, alert, public-spirited trustee, with his thin cigar, a mere quill of a cigar, and his black coffee, and that easy indifference that the Chicago trustee loves, could say, "It is—I believe—now—the largest in the world. Vienna? Yes—" but ah, the gentle, precise emphasis of that word. "Vienna? Yes; next." In Chicago much hangs on the word "next." Are you first in the world—or next? Between those extremes all lies—favor, happiness, everything.

Through the receiving-room passes also the various business of the College and of its people. Patients of members of the faculties come here to consult their doctors because the situation is central, and the business man, pressed for time, finds it convenient to run in for hasty consultation. Some of the faculty have their private offices at the college; during the busy hours of the day it is easier to find them here than on State Street. All this traffic, the private patients for the doctors, the public patients for the clinics, the callers on business, and those seeking business, are sorted in the receiving-room and directed to their seeking.

This is done by a woman—a woman, because no man could hope successfully to handle the stream of people whose feet cross the College threshold. Men have

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tried and failed. To tell the canvasser from the one that is entitled to admission, the prospecting fiend from the man of business, the one that pays from the one that does not pay, in a word, the sheep from the goats—who for this but a woman? And of women, who like Miss Martin?

Miss Martin sits in the chair behind the table that commands the double doors. Her position visibly threatens the intruder. To the peddler it is a menace; to the unfortunate it is a barrier; to the prosperous, a clearing house. Miss Martin, in the language of the lodge, is the inner guard; she is paid to shield busy men. It is her business to welcome the unfortunate whose lot it is to wait and to wait, and to see that the man with the check book who calls brusquely for his doctor gets him without delay. She has her assistants, assistants for the several clinics and for the private offices; she has her typewriter; she has the messenger calls, the college calls, the telephones. She is tall, fair of face, and dark of hair and eyes and dress. Lips thin-nish, but ruddy, like lips that breed hemorrhages. Teeth white and regular. Placid, alive, intelligent, she is one that can listen calmly to sorrowful things; unmoved to startling things; marblelike to awful things. In her mental attitude Miss Martin is, in a word, never "next" on any proposition; she is "first" always, whether it be on "The World's Greatest Living Artists" in twenty-four volumes, a modified tontine in the form of an annuity bond, a malingering damage case done in very old clothes or a really malignant trachoma in a visitor from Southern Illinois. She is informed on the essential advantages of the true Delsarte, differ-

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entiating it clearly from the false, and can pass rapidly on the points of a military corset should one impertinently be presented during business hours. At this moment she was talking to a lady with a little girl.

The long rows of chairs in the receiving-room were filled with waiting patients disposed in the silently miserable attitudes that mark the suffering that is dumb. At the several doors of the operating-rooms for the eye, the ear, and the nose and throat, ushers called at intervals by number for clinic cards. At each call the lines stirred and, followed by all eyes that still could see, a patient stumbled forward and handed in his red ticket at the eye-door or his blue ticket at the ear-door or his green ticket at the nose-and-throat-door. As he disappeared through the portal, heads subsided into hands, shawls and mufflers, and the receiving-room buzzed low again with the murmur of silence. It was long past the luncheon hour, and the lady in black with the little girl stood before Miss Martin's table.

She was a patient lady, young herself, and the little girl did not look above eight. "Do you think," asked the mother, "there will be any use of my waiting longer to-day?"

She had been waiting since half-past eleven o'clock; it was now after two. Miss Martin was puzzled, because she knew her to be a patient of Doctor Kurd's. She had been of late a frequent caller with this little girl, who, Miss Martin understood, was going blind. But if Doctor Kurd had given her an appointment at the College why hadn't he kept it? Doctor Kurd never let profitable patients escape—he was the last man in

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the College to do that. Astute as she was, women sometimes gave Miss Martin pause. A woman can tell whether a man can pay; but who can answer for a woman? Provided her affections are not involved no man can deceive a woman; but a woman may. This lady, this Mrs. Eliot for instance, her face when she first began to call had been bright and the poise of her head spoke confidence. Latterly her manner showed depression, anxiety—and her doctor, one of the leading surgeons of the College and the town, acted as if he were at least indifferent; it occurred to Miss Martin that the business could not be very good. She made no allowance for hours spent in the depression of the receiving-room, being herself used to that. When she had gone out for luncheon Mrs. Eliot was waiting; when she returned, refreshed by coffee and chicken pie at the Women's Exchange, and by the whirl and the sun of two blocks of State Street, Mrs. Eliot was still waiting—Doctor Kurd most unaccountably hadn't come. If he had cared very much for his patient's comfort, Miss Martin decided, he would have come. If he was indifferent she could not well afford enthusiasm; her apologies were vague.

"I don't know, really; I should hardly look for the doctor now before three o'clock. You might—" ventured Miss Martin, relenting, doubtfully, "go out and get your lunch."

"But if he came in and went away again I should miss him." Miss Martin could not gainsay it.

The little girl, a tot with babyish eyes and brown curls, listened at her mother's side. The fingers of one fat hand wandered over the row of push-buttons along

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the side of the table. Miss Martin, smiling, put her hand away; children around desks are troublesome. Mrs. Eliot, balancing chances, looked appealingly at the clock, which professed to be corrected daily by the Western Union Telegraph Company; but beyond the pointed statement that it was half-past two, the clock, slave to a corporation, could suggest nothing. Give up, Mrs. Eliot felt she could not; she led the child back to the chairs.

"When shall we go, mamma?" asked the little one as they sat down.

"Pretty soon, Ruth."

"Mamma," whispered Ruth, with the pause of a child, "I'm hungry."

"Yes, dearie; pretty soon we'll go."

After another pause, "Mamma, I want a drink." Rising, her mother led her across the room to the water-cooler.

"Let me hold the cup, mamma. Oh, mamma, I can see a cloud around the cup," cried Ruth, taking the mug in her hand.

"Can you, dearie?" asked her mother, with mechanical sadness.

"Can you, blue eyes?" echoed a voice behind them. A surgeon who had just come in stood at Mrs. Eliot's elbow. He repeated his question to Ruth, "Can you see a cloud?"

Ruth did not venture reply. "Don't do it, don't see any clouds," said the strange gentleman, pinching her chin mildly.

"Oh, do not drink out of that," he exclaimed, with apprehension, as Mrs. Eliot filled the cup. He opened

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the door of a cabinet just above the cooler and took down a thin tumbler. "Use this. Let me help you." He filled the glass, and, smiling, gave it to Ruth. When Ruth had finished he asked her mother with deference whether she would drink. Declining, she thanked him and he filled the glass for himself. He was young, the deferential gentleman; smooth-faced and tall. He was quick and easy in movement; nervous energy flowed from his finger-tips.

While he stood drinking the water the main door flew open and a second surgeon hurried into the room. His step was brisk and heavy. He was stocky in figure, his neck short and ruddy, and his manner abrupt. He looked around the room hurriedly, saw Mrs. Eliot and bobbed forward. His eyes were very bright, his cheeks newly shaven around a black mustache, and his hair, which was straight and thick and black, burst, as he took off his hat, aggressively from his forehead.

"Why, Mrs. Eliot, how do you do?" he exclaimed, with the cordial emphasis that simulates sincerity. "I am afraid I have kept you waiting." A protest that would not sink in her eyes he choked down with an apology. "A sudden illness of one of the staff over at the hospital put me in the harness for three hours. I telephoned the College here. Miss Martin, didn't you get my message for Mrs. Eliot? What? Why, I don't understand that. I stood right by the girl while she was 'phoning it. However—step right this way, Mrs. Eliot. Ruth, how do you do to-day? Not very well? Why, I'm sorry. Come with me. By the way,

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doctor," he added, speaking to the tall young man who had by this time crossed to the lockers, "I've got a case here I'd like you to look at in a minute—" The one addressed as doctor was taking off his coat. "I shall be in my office," he replied.

CHAPTER II

THE Miss Borderlys' meant more than the Misses Borderly. It meant besides three old maids, three brick houses and a stone house, communicating and adjoining, situated on a lower southside avenue.

The Miss Borderlys' meant an establishment and a very considerable one conducted by the Misses Borderly. There was Miss Mary Borderly, who was Miss Borderly proper, and Miss Anna, and Miss June Borderly, who might be described as Miss Borderly improper. The first and eldest stood for dignity. She was like her bill of fare, plumply generous, but within bounds. She sat during meals on a dais in the dining-room and, what was of first importance to the establishment, was "strictly business." The next sister, Miss Anna, was in no respect notable except that without having them she continually gave the impression of weak eyes. This may have been mere apathy; her sisters overshadowed her, the older, Miss Mary, with her dignity; the younger, Miss June, with her profanity.

Miss June Borderly supplied in the trio of old maids the sporting element. When taxed with her iniquities she would frankly say, "Well, I never had any brothers—the meanness that belonged by rights to boys in our family all stuck to me. But I'm up, just the same," she would add, defiantly, if the game was poker, "and

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you're not, Mr. Mitchell; nor you either, John C. My ante is there every time."

And there it certainly could be found if there was a game anywhere under the roof. Miss June was tall, exceedingly tall, with a face of unusual length. Her face was uncompromisingly plain, her brows arched high most of the time at the world's wickedness, and she had one large, cold, gray, weeping eye. Her other eye was large and cold and reasonably gray, but it did not transfix like its mournful mate. Mr. Bowles, of the Annex set, who was a newspaper man and wrote for the funny papers, called the main eye Miss June's April; but all the same when it was poker if April clouded he anted at once.

Gambling was a propensity of Miss June's for which she offered no apology. It never went above penny ante or euchre for a prize, yet it was a mania; as distinctly one as if she had belonged to the Board of Trade. Nor was gambling her only failing; she swayed at times perceptibly toward strong language, and if there is such a thing as being an ethical drunkard or going on a moral spree Miss June will be ultimately held, I fear, for some excess of the sort. She was certainly at all times inclined to skepticism in religious matters and she had periods of unbelief that were no less than immoderate.

It will easily be understood that in Miss Borderlys' June was a factor. She looked after the gas bills, hired and discharged the servants, and took what she herself termed frankly the kicks. The intending kicker was instinctively awed by Miss Mary's dignity; Anna was apathetic to complaints; but the boarder with a

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grievance could get an interview with Miss June anywhere, at any time, on any subject connected with the establishment. If her sad eye encouraged a stranger to begin a disturbance it acted after the discussion was fairly under way as a peacemaker—something on the principle of a machine gun.

Beyond this tendency to occasional man or woman-slaughter, to which she could properly plead self-defense, Miss June performed the office of comforter and gossip at Borderlys'. She heard, I do not say believed, the many tales of woe within the gates, and she mercifully kept the brick houses, which constituted the plebeian end of the establishment, informed as to the doings of the Annex set, the aristocrats who occupied the big stone-front and made up the exclusive end of the big dining-room.

Yet Miss June could tell much and leave much untold, saving, perhaps, as to the depravity of cooks; on that subject she cultivated no reserve. It was half-past three o'clock when Mrs. Eliot got back to the boarding-house with Ruth. She rang at the north basement door; Miss June answered the bell. The double doors leading from the hall to the dining-room were closed.

"We are too late for luncheon, aren't we?" ventured Mrs. Eliot, looking with a touch of appeal into Miss June's tall face. June's brows and voice rose together.

"Lunch? My grief! It's half-past three o'clock!" she exclaimed, like a firecracker.

"I know," broke in Mrs. Eliot, appeasingly, "it is too late, of course. Oh, we were kept so, waiting."

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"Can't I have something, mamma?" whispered Ruth, clinging to her skirt.

"Hush, dear," said her mother, taking her hand, "dinner will be ready pretty soon. Come."

If there was one thing June Borderly had a horror of, so she said, it was children. She said this of children and of cooks and of gas companies. In June Borderly's inferno for these offenders there will be exclusive pits. Oddly enough, June reversed the usual beginnings of doubt; she found no difficulty in believing in hell; it was only concerning heaven that she remained unconvinced. She stood a moment looking indignantly after Mrs. Eliot as the troubled lady soothed and hurried Ruth upstairs. June might have been imprecating. Her attitude was profane at all events, and there was a vague anathema in her eye.

The stairs were heavy and with empty stomachs they were hard to climb. Mrs. Eliot's room was at the rear of the hall on the second floor. She closed the door behind her just as Ruth's patience broke softly into sobs; she was very tired and very hungry. Her mother took off her little reefer jacket and hat and tried to quiet her sobs, but she made a poor attempt, for her own heart was troubled. Taking Ruth at last in her arms, she rocked her till the hunger was forgotten, then tiptoed with her over to the bed. Supporting her on one arm, she pulled back the spread, laid her down and lay down beside her. Ruth turned uneasily, sobbing a little yet in her sleep. At length she threw her head on her mother's arm and lay quiet. Mrs. Eliot's eyes were fixed on the ceiling where flyspecked roses in plaster of paris hung about a three-burner chandelier. The

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room had once been part of a home; it was now part of a house. A knock at the door interrupted her reflections. Ruth started uneasily as her mother rose. It was Miss June, indefinitely tall in the gloom and indefinitely threatening. She walked solemnly in with a flaring glass of milk and a plate of crackers. At the vision Ruth's eyes opened and she sat up. June marched over to the bed and put the tray in her lap.

"Oh, Miss June, you shouldn't have taken this trouble," said Mrs. Eliot, softly.

"Children are eternal trouble, I know that; you can't tell me anything about children; I know 'em." She sat down on the side of the bed and looked at Ruth Eliot as a monster hovering over a victim meditates mildly. Presently she turned on the mother, who had hardly recovered her breath.

"Sit down," she said, peremptorily; "what's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, yes there is." After a pause, "You're in trouble—"

"No."

"Yes you are. You can't fool me. What've you been crying about? I've got as many troubles as anybody in Chicago. I don't cry."

Her main eye, April, shone moist and searching on Ruth's mother; her good eye was non-committal, but there was a note in her voice from somewhere near the heart. It didn't need much to win the weary woman's confidence just then; she was heavy.

"I haven't been crying, but I feel like crying."

"Then why don't you cry? It'll do you more good

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than anything else when you feel like it. I cry like fury sometimes."

"Ruth's eye—the one that was injured—I told you about it—"

"What's the matter—is it worse?"

Mrs. Eliot nodded impressively and shook her head mournfully, looking toward Ruth. Ruth, too, looked grave and buried the blue offender deep in the glass of milk.

"Some terrible disease has followed the inflammation."

"How did her eye get hurt?"

"A little boy shot a ball out of a Roman candle at her on the Fourth of July and it struck her in the eye. Oh, what a Fourth of July *that* was. Now she may lose the eye."

Mrs. Eliot spoke under repression, but what it cost her to speak was written in her face. "Since I have been told I can hardly think," she struggled on. "Isn't it a terrible dream? In Evanston I had her under the care of our own physician. Then they told me I must go to an oculist, and my friends said Doctor Kurd was the best. When he saw her he said I had waited too long. I have to take Ruth down every other day and sometimes we have to wait so for him, and he is so busy. Sometimes he seems to me almost indifferent. Delay and anxiety—and expense—the expense is fearful. Doctor Kurd's time is in great demand, of course.

"He makes you think so," blurted June.

"Do you know him?"

"Kurd?" exclaimed June, gutturally fierce and with

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impressive pause, "I guess I do. He used to board here." Mrs. Eliot dimly conceived what that meant.

"Did he?" she echoed, feebly.

"This wasn't good enough for him. He thought he could get his name up quicker by going to some swell hotel. So your friends told you he was the best, did they? You go to the Apostle's Memorial, don't you? Ah-ha; he's the big man up there."

"He is Doctor Batterly's oculist."

"Of course," assented June, with rapidly lighting face, "that makes him the big man in the church, don't it? But he *ain't* the best, my dear madam, not by a long shot. D'you know why he's always so busy when you're waiting? Because you're not a big swell, with a carriage and footman, that can turn business to him—that's why. Kurd? I guess I know him. You'll chase that man until you are blind for all he'll worry about it. Doctor Kurd is out for the stuff, and you're only a music-teacher and earn your living. Don't you suppose he knows it?" demanded June with a show of force.

Mrs. Eliot took the empty glass and plate from Ruth. "He says an operation will have to be performed," she responded, "or she may lose—"

"Lose her eye?"

"Both eyes," sobbed Mrs. Eliot, breaking down at last.

"My godfrey! I'll bet," exclaimed June, rallying unsteadily, "he's only trying to scare you. What kind of an operation?"

"Oh, I couldn't understand it at all."

"That means five hundred dollars," observed June

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grimly. "When he gets you where you don't understand things, then look out. It means five hundred dollars."

"Oh, June, don't say that."

"Five hundred dollars to a thousand. He wanted to operate on my eye—the old fraud." June shook her head defiantly at the recollection.

Ruth threw her face into her mother's lap. Though she suffered constant pain, she complained little. That was why people in the house thought her such a queer little girl. "My dearie, my dearie," murmured her mother, clasping her. "What will become of you and me?"

"Why didn't you tell me in the first place how bad it was?" demanded June, indignantly. "I could have told you what to do. The best eye doctor in Chicago lives right in this house; he's lived here for three years. *He* don't have to chase into high-toned churches and board at swell hotels to get business. He stays right here—he's over in the Annex—and he's forgot more about eyes than Doctor Kurd 'll ever know. Well, he has; and he's got more heart than Doctor Kurd has cheek—and that's saying a good deal, the Lord knows."

"Who is he, June?"

"Doctor Bryson."

"Bryson?"

"Yes, Henry Bryson. Why? Do you know him?"

"No, but haven't I heard the name?"

"Like enough. I guess everybody's heard it. He is in the Laflin College."

"That is where I must have heard it."

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"You ought to hear it there. He's the smartest man in the whole institution."

"I remember. Doctor Kurd has spoken of him."

"He didn't tell you that Bryson was there, did he? I guess not. He didn't tell you he boarded here, did he? I guess not. Kurd is one of the professors there, and Bryson is *the* professor; that's all the difference. Swell churches and hotels don't count down there, let me tell you. It's business, you bet. Mrs. Eliot, you're a goose, running after that man Kurd. He's looking for big patients—that's the reason he's so busy. If you'd told me I could have put you on the right track in half an hour. I'd have had Doctor Bryson look at her eye—then you'd know what the matter is."

"Do you suppose he would look at her eye, Miss June?"

"He would if I said so. Oh, you needn't be afraid. I know what I'm talking about. I nursed him through pneumonia once and he said he'd have died if it hadn't been for me."

"But if he is such a celebrated doctor I could never pay his fees. I can hardly keep up with Doctor Kurd."

"You just wait till I see him and have a little talk with him after dinner. Just brace up. I know what I'm talking about and I know *him*."

When everything looks desperate any confidence is reassuring. There was fire in June's words; when she took the tray and left the room she left a glimmer of hope.

Dinner at Miss Borderlys' is served at six o'clock. Ten tables are set and three items of the bill of fare are always good: the roast beef, the coffee, and the ice-

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cream. Moreover, they are served in abundance. Of the ten tables eight are as to occupancy interchangeable. Two tables in the south end of the dining-room, which is made up of four basements thrown together, are exclusive. They are the Annex tables, and they belong to the aristocrats of the establishment, those that occupy the brown-stone house. At the Annex tables custom at dinner tolerates full dress. It is not discouraged by Miss Mary Borderly, for it gives tone to the dining-room. Then, the eight tablefuls like to affect contempt for the habit, while they themselves dine on an equality with it.

Mrs. Eliot and Ruth had seats in the lesser light of the north end, where the Annex set was known only by reputation. June Borderly, not ordinarily visible at dinner-time, appeared that night after the meats were served and betrayed some air of responsibility. She talked a few moments on the dais with Miss Mary and talked at the sideboards, where the head-waitresses marshaled the reserves of fruits and nuts, and all the while watched the Annex tables, in especial the head table, and when after dessert two young men rose she wound through the aisles and intercepted them at the south entrance.

"Doctor, where are you going so fast?" she asked of the taller of the two.

"I? Nowhere. It's John C. that's going to-night," replied the doctor, catching his companion by the arm. "He has a date. Think of that, Miss June; John C. with a date."

"I want to see you."

"You may; but it will cost you money."

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"I don't care. You can go, Mr. Allison."

"Thank you," said the doctor's companion, amiably. Miss June walked upstairs with them. "Doctor," she began when Allison left them at the reception-room, "I want you to do something for me."

"What shall it be?" asked the doctor, crossing his legs as he sat down in front of her. "Is it quick?"

"I don't know whether it is or not. I want you to look at a little girl's eyes for me."

"That's easy. When and where?"

"Now just hold on; don't be so fast. This little thing is the dearest child you ever saw in your life. She is right here in the house, and you can look at her eyes now if you will."

"I will."

"Haven't you honestly anything to do?"

"If you wait till I've nothing to do, my opinion on anybody's eyes won't count. Bring her up to the room. Is she at dinner?"

"Yes."

"Bring her up."

"Shall I bring her mother too?"

"As you like. I shan't eat her up."

"But, doctor—"

"Well—doctor what?"

"They haven't very much money."

"Miss June, is this a conspiracy?"

"You won't be short with her, will you?"

"I never have been short with any friends of yours, have I?" June struck her hands together with a look of triumph. "We'll be up."

CHAPTER III

DOCTOR BRYSON, with his friend John C. Allison, had the front rooms on the second floor of the Annex. They had in the two suites a large living-room, their den, and besides the separate bedrooms the doctor had an apartment over the hall which he used as a sort of office. It was at the door of this that Miss June, her friends in convoy, knocked a few minutes later. The little room was lighted by a student lamp, green-shaded, that threw Bryson up, tall and slender, as he opened the door. As he bowed, Mrs. Eliot got a look at him—it was the young surgeon of the water-cooler at the college. His face was grave and his manner cordial. After introduction to her mother he held out both his hands to Ruth and took her in with him. The office was simply provided. A table supported some shelves of books. On the opposite wall hung an engraving of "The Doctor." The floor was laid in parquetry; two or three chairs and a pair of revolving stools made up the equipment. When the visitors were installed and the doctor sat easily on a stool, their heads were brought close together; the room was small.

"You sit here, Ruth," suggested Doctor Bryson, confidentially, placing her on the other stool. "Then, while they are talking, we can talk. Now, which is the sick eye? This one?" He drew Ruth's stool closer to the lamp and laid one hand on her curls. His thumb

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touched her right upper eyelid, and, moving the lamp a little as he did so, he drew the eyelid far back.

"There has been some inflammation here," he observed, without looking up.

"Yes, doctor," said Mrs. Eliot.

"Some external injury."

"She was struck in the eye last Fourth of July by a ball from a Roman candle, doctor, and her eye became terribly inflamed."

With a murmur of assent, still inspecting the cornea, he asked other questions. Presently he drew Ruth closer. "How was your roast beef at dinner to-night, Ruth? Tough?"

"Yes, sir."

"Real tough?"

Mrs. Eliot looked startled. "You outrageous man!" protested June, vehemently. Doctor Bryson covered Ruth's left eye with a blotter and held the fingers of his right hand up and back.

"How many fingers can you count, Ruth?"

"Three, sir."

"How many now?"

"Two."

"Hold this before your left eye," he enjoined, giving her the pad as he rose and stepped back from her.

"How many now?"

"One, sir."

"How many now?" he asked, receding with each question.

"Three; no, four."

"Now?"

"One."

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"Now?"

"Not any." He was holding up three, but he stopped and said, "Very good, Ruth." June, while saying nothing, thought it very bad. Sitting down, he pressed lightly on the upper lid of the sick eye with the fore-fingers of each hand, and began asking questions very rapidly of her mother as to the severity and duration of the first attack, the subsequent pain, the general condition of the child's health—many questions, which June could not see bore on the issue at all. Then the doctor resumed with Ruth.

"Did you have ice-cream for dinner?" he asked, insinuatingly, holding her cheeks in his hands.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you see anything around the light, Ruth?"

"Yes, sir."

"What?"

"I can see a rainbow."

"Did you have two dishes of ice-cream, Ruth?"

"No, sir."

"It's a shame the way they starve little girls here; you come to my table and sit next to me and you shall have two. Does that hurt very much, Ruth?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"That's all. You're a brave little chick. And you have sweet eyes; but one is very, very sick. The right eye is in bad condition, Mrs. Eliot."

"What's the matter with it, doctor?" demanded June.

"Glaucoma."

"What's glaucoma?"

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He looked wryly at her. "A very troublesome thing."

"Can't you do anything for it?" asked June, bluntly.

"Something may be done for it," he answered, slowly. "We can't always say whether what is done will do any good."

"Well, I'll tell you the whole story if you want to hear it," broke in June, with her accustomed spirit. The doctor's manner gave the impression that, while not vitally interested, he was at least too courteous to dissuade her, and June did not wait for encouragement. "Mrs. Eliot has been taking Ruth to Doctor Kurd; she never heard of you—"

Doctor Bryson looked quizzically at Mrs. Eliot. "The embarrassment is only mine."

"I am beginning to think it is mine, doctor," she interposed, with a little pathetic smile.

"Well, you know how I like Kurd," stormed June.

"How do you like him, Ruth?" asked the doctor, in his confidential way.

"I don't like him. We have to wait so long. I get so hungry."

"And I told her mother it is because she isn't a big bug riding around in a carriage that he's always so busy, and I told her *I* had a friend—"

"That was the smartest man in Chicago," interrupted the doctor.

"—and I wanted him to see the eye," continued June, unabashed, "and say just what *he* thought of it. And that if he would take the case he could do more than all the other—" Doctor Bryson groaned. "I

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don't care," blurted June, "I said more than all the other doctors in the United States."

"I hope you know her," observed the doctor to Mrs. Eliot.

"I know her heart," returned Mrs. Eliot. "But, doctor," and she spoke now with something that pleaded for sincerity, "would you tell me what you think—just what you think of it?" It was a hard tone to escape from. He did not for a moment reply. "It would be such a relief to have your judgment," she added, watching his face.

"If I could be sure it would be a relief," he answered. "I like to be frank. On the other hand," he continued after a pause, "I am in a delicate position. Kurd is on our staff. This is his case, and it is a grave one. I may say, though, that I have seen the eye twice before."

"You have?" exclaimed the women together.

"Once before to-day," he added, "but that was in my office. Ruth wouldn't remember."

"I remember, sir."

"You do—do you remember?"

"Why, you little skit, why didn't you say so?" cried June.

"Ruth doesn't tell all she knows," interposed the doctor, putting his hand on her head. She looked up at him an instant, questioningly, twisted her fingers together, slid off her stool, and sidled childishly between his long legs. If he was a bit startled he concealed it. She got as close to him as she could and looked then contentedly over at June and at her mother; it was the confidence of a child. Doctor Bryson put an arm

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around Ruth and bent down to her. "Kurd," he said, looking at Ruth and weighing his words, "asked my opinion to-day."

"What did you say?" asked June.

"He asked my opinion about an iridectomy. He has been trying to pull the iris down with eserine—"

"What's an iridectomy, doctor?" demanded June.

"Didn't Kurd explain?" asked Bryson, looking at Mrs. Eliot.

"He spoke of an operation, but he did not explain."

"Explain!" said June, savagely. "Oh, he's too busy. I explained it meant five hundred dollars before she got through. Now you tell us all about what it is, doctor."

"An iridectomy is a delicate and complicated operation to open up the drainage canal of the eye and relieve the excessive interior pressure."

"Doctor," exclaimed June, impulsively, "you do it—will you?"

Bryson squirmed. His demur was evident. "Kurd is a perfectly competent and skilled operator—"

"Operator granny. I wouldn't let him operate on a cat."

"Nonsense, Miss June."

"I know it is your good heart," interposed Mrs. Eliot, addressing June, "but we have no right to impose on Doctor Bryson. I would not embarrass you in any way, doctor. Only my own bewilderment has led me to intrude on your kindness—"

"I take the responsibility," said June, defiantly. "If I'd known her eye was so bad before, I'd have brought

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her over here before. You didn't tell me," she said, turning to Mrs. Eliot.

"I haven't any right to lay all my troubles at your door, June."

"I don't care," snapped June, tossing her head with gathering spirit. "When it comes to saving an eye for a little angel like that child this whole darned boarding house ought to turn out and do something. My god-frey! I'd just like to know how many times I've carried meals up and down these stairs for women that wasn't half as sick as I was all the time I was waiting on them. I'd like to know how many times I've helped men to their rooms when they couldn't tell a bell-boy from a beer stein," she stormed, with rising indignation.

"Now, Miss June," begged Bryson, dryly, "don't expose us in that way."

"Yes I have, and you know it better than anybody else!"

"Oh, heavens," cried the doctor, "are you going to make me out a public drunkard?"

"You know what I mean. You know how these fellows carry on. You know what Huntington and Bowles are—you've helped straighten 'em out yourself often enough, I guess."

"And you put mustard plasters on me one night till I couldn't wear anything but vaseline for a week," retorted Bryson. "That is true, Mrs. Eliot. She did save me one night—and ever since I've barely had the life of a dog."

"Now, I say when we're doing such things all the

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time for a lot of *good-for-nothings* that everybody's got to do all they can for this child."

"Everybody, meaning me," murmured Bryson.

"Oh, Miss June," protested Mrs. Eliot in confusion.

June twisted her head. "Well, it wouldn't be the first time I've meant you, doctor. Nor the first time you've come up to scratch, either. Give the devil his due."

"Thank you for the association of ideas."

"Now, doctor," June did not weaken for a moment, "look at that child. She's cuddling up there to you out of downright pure instinct. She knows you can save her—it's as plain as my face. Don't—" she waved at Mrs. Eliot, who strove to interrupt. "Doctor, you're going to do it. You know you can do as you please down there. You can fix it somehow to get rid of Kurd—and you do that iribotamy you said, yourself—now, will you?"

June had outdone her best; she paused silenced by her own eloquence. Mrs. Eliot couldn't speak; the doctor didn't seem to want to. Ruth looked into his face; it was the appeal of silence.

"Do you hear what she said, Ruth?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"What do you say?" She pressed closer to him.

"What do you say to all that?"

She looked into his face, and her almost sightless eye, its blue stretched wide and helpless, struck him hard. She hesitated, squirmed, looked away and looked at him again. "I love you, doctor," she whispered.

"You do, you little darling?" he cried, surprised.

"You do? Well, I'll never go back on a girl that loves

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me. You're the first girl that ever told me that in my life. Yes, you are—"

"He never gave me a chance to express my feelings," muttered June, with an April wink at Mrs. Eliot.

"Come in here and see my big bear, Ruth," exclaimed Bryson, taking her by the shoulder. "Show her the bear, Miss June."

"Come on, Ruth," cried June, "this is a bigger bear than he is. There's nothing like logic, is there, doctor?" she added, taking Ruth with a backward glance of triumph.

"Nothing like your logic, certainly. It's the worst I ever saw," replied Bryson.

"I am afraid," interposed Mrs. Eliot, guarding her gratitude with low tones, "I can never justify myself in coming to you in this way. It is all so unexpected—circumstances have seemed to run away with me—"

"A little bit with all of us, I guess," Bryson cut in good-naturedly. "No matter, we will make the best of them now. I will do what I can, at least. But I ought to say that in my opinion Kurd can do everything I can—the chances are not favorable for either of us." She looked quickly at him. It was as if she had words to say, but checked herself; he paused as if to ask for them.

"If I may be quite frank, doctor, failure would be easier to bear if you made the attempt than if Doctor Kurd made it."

"Will you walk into the den?"

"If I am not able to pay you all at once for your services, doctor," she ventured, pausing in front of

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him, "would you allow me to pay you partly in installments?"

He turned the subject with a gesture. "Any way you like. Don't let us discuss that feature."

"I speak of it only because I must," returned Mrs. Eliot. He waved his hand toward the sitting-room where Ruth and June were talking. "Thank you," she murmured, passing close before him.

CHAPTER IV

AT parting that night Doctor Bryson gave Mrs. Eliot and Ruth an appointment at the college for the next morning at half-past nine. In a jocular way he suggested that Miss June go down with them. Perhaps he didn't think she would go, but June would go anywhere with anybody. She fed on excitement, and if better diversion lacked she would not slight a funeral to see, if nothing more, how the mourners took it.

But on this morning June kept Mrs. Eliot waiting for the elaborate toilet she made for the occasion. In consequence they were an hour late when they reached the College. June bullied Miss Martin, quarreled with Jim (Doctor Bryson's colored boy), stuck her head into the doctor's eye-clinic lecture, and, pacing up and down the receiving-room, swung her umbrella like a drum major. The doctor, when he finally appeared to receive them, looked a trifle annoyed, but he resumed his deference when he spoke to Mrs. Eliot and led them across the room to his own office. "I shall keep you waiting only a minute," said he, seating them. "We are nearly through in there."

Opening off the office an ante-room connected with the lecture hall he had just left. Where they sat they could see through the two doors students mingling with the white-gowned nurses and surgeons who stood about the operating table. The odor of anti-

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septics, plain in the receiving-room, was strong in the office.

The major operations in the morning eye clinic were over; the assistants were making ready for the last. They were preparing a woman, a very little, very old woman, for the table. Her daughter, herself a gray-haired woman, was with her and was helping. She was quite docile, the old one, as they made her ready. Once she put her hand on the arm of the nurse who was pinning her hair into a linen towel. "Bitte—et—was Wasser," she murmured. But the head nurse whispered to the daughter to bid her mother wait, and the little old woman, quite patient, waited.

In the ante-room Bryson had slipped out of his coat again and into his gown. A man and a woman sitting in front of the table got up and walked in to where he stood preparing for the operation. The man's right eye was bandaged heavily and the left one closed; the woman led him.

"Doctor," began the man, irresolutely, "ain't it possible no way to save it, don't you think?"

"No."

"I talked yesterday with a doctor over at the Infirmary—he thought maybe there might be a show to save it."

"You had better let him handle it then."

"I've been thinking," the man went on in a broken way, "I'd better have it taken out—the way you said—but the woman, doctor—she can't hardly stand me losing th' eye."

He was a laborer, his hands big and gnarled. He wore a canvas coat, a cotton shirt, a pair of overalls.

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His feet were in coarse shoes that bunched in wrinkles over the insteps. The wife, skirted and hooded darkly, clung in wretched silence to his arm. Bryson, buttoning his gown snug, spoke rapidly to the woman.

"If you don't have his right eye taken out to-day he will lose the other eye, too. Don't you understand? I can save the left eye if I operate to-day on the other—to-morrow, I told you, will be too late. There's a piece of steel in there as big as my finger-nail. If you try to save that eye you lose both. What good would it do to save it? He could never see with it, anyway."

He spoke fast, and his words fell like strokes on an anvil, relentless. It was the wife he struck at. She shrunk, womanlike, from the pitiless decree, but, womanlike, she would not yield her husband's eye. An eye so good—none better—only week before last! She stood shrinking, fortified by that divine armor of instinct which is woman's alone. Sometimes it goes wrong, sometimes it costs eyesight, sometimes happiness, sometimes life—yet woman cannot discard it if she would. She hesitated, writhed under the torture, but the horror she put off. The man and woman whispered together a minute. Then the man spoke, his voice hoarse with his struggle. "Doctor."

"Yes."

"She thinks as she couldn't stand it to-day. It's a hard thing to lose me eye."

"All right," replied Doctor Bryson, drawling ominously the first word.

"We'll come back to-morrow."

"All right. But don't come back to me."

"Why not, doctor?"

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"I won't touch it after to-day."

"Doctor, I—"

"Not after to-day. They're waiting for me at the table. You'll have to excuse me."

Doctor Bryson walked into the lecture-room. The man, led by his wife, followed him. Irresolution stayed them, and they sat again on the front bench. The man bent forward and covered his face with his hands; the woman, laying her hand on his shoulder, listened vacantly to the talk of Bryson, now taking up his instruments for the operation on the very old woman, who lay stretched on the table.

"You have seen this eye, gentlemen," he was saying. "A case of senile cataract. The right eye went nine years ago with glaucoma." Mrs. Eliot remembered that dread word. "The left appears quite healthy, but the sight has become completely obscured by a cataract which is now, as you have observed, ripe. The patient has seen eighty years—more than are likely to bother any of us, but I would operate if she were ninety. Her health is good, nichtwahr, Mutter? Sie sind ganz gesund, nichtwar?" he asked, raising his voice to the little woman under the knife. She lifted her head slightly. "Ja, ja, Doctor. Ich bin gesund, blos meine Augen—" she replied in the shrunken tone of age.

"Exactly. Sei ganz ruhig jetzt, Mutter. Ganz ruhig. Verstehen Sie? Sound and maybe with twenty years of life and sight ahead of her. Cocaine, four per cent., makes the operation simple, safe and comparatively pleasant," added the doctor, mechanically jovial. "But be very sure your patient doesn't grow obstreperous after you get your knife into the cornea. It is one

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of the most satisfactory operations you will have." He stopped, for the delicate blade in his hand was already slipping through the insensible cornea—splitting it, deftly, as a butcher splits a kidney. It went all with care, yet steadily. Shimmering instruments, delicate manipulation, eager sponges, weaving fingers, low voices, and from her, under it all, quiet and silence absolute. Eighty years had trained the little old woman; she lay as she was bid—very still.

Through the open door Mrs. Eliot and June saw it all in a kind of trance, their eyes fixed on the central figure—the surgeon of the eye. They watched him a long time bending close, passing and taking instruments and sponges, and at last he handed something to the head nurse on a bit of cotton and straightened up like one whose back tires, wiped his fingers on a napkin, threw it into the wire basket on the floor and watched the assistants bandage the eye. While the final wrappings were being made, Doctor Bryson was washing his hands. Then slipping off his gown and taking his handkerchief from his pocket he rounded up informally and amiably his class talk, throwing into it nuggets of advice smoothed with pleasantries and polished with conciseness.

The men filed from the benches, some leaving the room, more crowding forward to ask questions. The little old woman was helped from the table. She put out her hands; her daughter took them and the mother whispered to her. They turned to the head nurse. "My mother says she thank you," said the younger woman. The nurse, nodding, told the daughter her mother was a good patient. They turned to Bryson.

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He laughed as the thin hands of the old one, guided by her daughter's, closed over one of his. Trying to speak, she could not, but bending she kissed the hand that had touched her eye that she might see. "Gott sei Dank," she muttered, huskily.

"Ach, mein lieber Gott, Mutter," exclaimed Bryson, laughing, "das ist nichts. Bitte, bitte. In zwei, höchstens drei Wochen sehen Sie wieder gut."

"Ich werde für Sie beten, Doctor."

"Danke, danke, Mutter. Ich empfehle mich!"

"What does she say?" asked the head nurse, smiling.

"She says she'll pray for me. How is that girl for the grafting at two o'clock? Did you keep her from eating?"

Talking together they walked into the office ante-room. The lecture hall was emptied of its people. All had gone their ways except two—the man with the steel chip in his eye and his wife. He remained just where he had bent when he sat down, with his face in his hands, still trying to decide whether to have it out—his eye. And she sat with her hand on his shoulder, the woman, mourning, comforting in silence. The doctor closed the ante-room door and they were left alone in the deserted hall.

"Now, Mistress Ruth," exclaimed Doctor Bryson, taking her hands, "we'll see how you are this morning. You didn't get mixed up in that quarrel with Jim and Miss Martin, did you? You just left Miss June to raise her row all alone."

June sat like one waking from a horrible dream. She held her unlucky umbrella in a grip of fear. "Doc-

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tor," she demanded, intently, "what was the matter with that woman?"

"The one I operated on? Cataract. She'll be all right in a few weeks."

"What was the matter with that man?"

"What man?"

"That poor man you were so cross to and wanted to take his eye out."

"That man is a railroad laborer," said the doctor, placing Ruth in front of him. "He was working in a yard-gang week before last. They were cutting rails and a steel chip flew from the chisel he was holding and struck him in the eye; cut through the lens—everything."

"Lord, you were cruel about it. I didn't know you could be so cruel."

"Cruelty is only kindness, Miss June, when you face a crisis. I could save his good eye by taking the other out at once. By to-morrow inflammation will have gone so far as to ruin the good eye. I gave him his choice, didn't I? If I had hummed and hawed they wouldn't have done anything till it was too late. They may not in any case. If they don't it will be because they lack confidence in my opinion, won't it?" June nodded. "Then they should keep away from me. Unless you have confidence in a doctor keep away from him. If they came back too late and I tried to take out the bad eye and save the good one I should fail, shouldn't I? Then they would blame me, wouldn't they? Take off your hat, Ruth, so I can see your curls. Why, they're just like sunshine

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and gold, aren't they? Now let's see how you count fingers this morning."

After he had taken her vision he went with her to the dark room and was gone a long time. June grew impatient and Mrs. Eliot anxious. When they returned the doctor was chatting and Ruth smiling. "Now," said he to June, "you take Ruth into the receiving-room and show her those big pictures a moment while I talk to her mother, will you?"

"We were gone a good while," he remarked to Mrs. Eliot as June closed the door behind her. He sat in his chair and Mrs. Eliot, one of her hands resting on the table between them, sat opposite. Her attitude was one of anxious expectancy, and in talking he spoke with deliberate care, neither solemnly nor yet lightly, playing frequently, as his elbows also rested on the table, with an ivory pocket-rule.

"You were making an examination, doctor."

"Your little girl interests me."

"Thank you, doctor." She waited for him to continue, but he studied the ivory rule.

"Is it—is it—"

"You wish to know whether it is serious," he said, taking up the sentence she could not finish. "I understand. On my part I want to be frank without causing unnecessary anxiety. It is serious."

"But, doctor—her eye can be saved?" she asked, with undefinable fear.

He answered carefully and with some reluctance. "It may be."

"Do you *think* it can?" she echoed with less hope. Her eyes were bent on him; he looked out of the

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window. It was an instant before he answered, and his features fixed in the uncertainty that he made no effort to hide. "You ask a hard question. It might be answered brutally—or hopefully; to answer it positively is hard. No one likes to go on record in a case like this. My opinions are sometimes quoted; sometimes misquoted."

"I know, doctor," she interposed, cutting him off, "it was the—the shock," she said, helplessly. "Doctor Kurd gave me less real hope. I should not have asked—"

"You have every right to ask—Ruth is a delicate child, is she not?"

"She isn't sickly, doctor."

"But not vigorous—robust. She is mild, delicate, gentle."

"Mentally so."

"The physical traits precede the mental," he mused, "and in the end it is the physical that tells the story. In glaucoma—secondary glaucoma, as this is—"

"But what is glaucoma, doctor?"

"Frankly, I don't know. If we knew—" his eyes changed—"if we really knew. I can give you the definition—anybody can do that. The fluids that feed the eye fail to discharge; the ball becomes tense from inward pressure, just as you might fill a toy bladder to bursting. The delicate coatings of the retina are torn and detached by ever increasing pressure. The eyeball becomes hard—stony hard; the optic nerve is cupped into its canal—the field of vision gradually narrows—sight flickers like a sinking candle—dies. We call it glaucoma. We have the theories as to its cause

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—theories. To look with an ophthalmoscope into a good eye," he said, changing his tone, "is to look upon life at the spring-time—at the best—red and warm. The glaucomatous eye is like a landscape blasted—barren, gray, dead. Ruth's eye is not that yet; it is living, but fearfully sick."

His eyes met hers. She could not support them, and her own turned to the big window. "I will undertake the attempt to save it," he added. "I will do what I can, but this you must not forget: the chances are against me."

She sat, aware of each shading of his tone, busy with inference from each inflection, looking out of the window. He himself, quick, instant to every impression, watched her narrowly and waited for her to look back. "Feel at perfect liberty to ask for another opinion," he continued. "I will call in one of our star men if you wish. The opinion of another might be more favorable."

"But not more able or more honest, doctor," she replied, looking into his face. His eyes dropped.

"I make mistakes," he said, simply. "Sometimes grave ones."

"You can afford, I am sure, to admit them," she returned. "Your reputation is not what it is without reason, and your fame brings deserved rewards. But your kind frankness, doctor, makes me say without reserve that my own resources are slight. I fear—" His hand lifted itself from the table in protest. "I shall not tax your resources," he remarked, humorously. "Miss June has been kind to me and I am glad to do anything for a friend of hers."

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Mrs. Eliot took his spirit. "And I mustn't lean too much on Miss June's kindness."

"No matter," he laughed, "we are started. I will undertake Ruth's eye, only I shall have to ask entire confidence."

"That will not be hard to give, doctor."

"Don't be too sure of that," he said, dropping his head wryly.

CHAPTER V

THE dining-room at Miss Borderlys' had distinct sets. The affairs of the big basement were like the affairs of a town. There was one table of widows, women with small competences and men of the left-over sort with sense enough to cling to what they had picked up earlier in the struggle. But this effort to keep their competency absorbed their mental activity and nothing living remained of their intellects. These people formed a set not so much of abilities in common as of limitations in common. There was a traveling men's table where, except on Sundays and holidays, no man sat; at all other times it was given over to the wives of traveling men. There were tables filled entirely by young business men and their wives—of men who run the business of the great downtown houses—men who were working so hard and making money so fast that their very eyes wrinkled with the suspicion that somebody might somehow get some of it away from them. Alert men, these, marvelously alert in ear and eye and reply and prodigal of smiles, but of smiles haunted with the possibility that they might at any time be called on for a temporary advance. There were women's tables—taken wholly by women that earned their livings. Women, if you will, of misfortune, if it really be a

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misfortune to be independent—and of industry and brains and hearts. These women, it must be understood, were not of the rank and file of workers, for at Miss Borderlys' it costs to live. They were chiefly women that command large salaries.

It was not the fact that the Annex set so far led the others at Miss Borderlys' that made it the most interesting. There were, at the Annex tables, some clever men and women, quite a number—yet not, with a few exceptions, more notable for what they had done than those of the upper rooms. But the Annex set at Miss Borderlys' was the set that had things and went to places; not only had money, but spent money. In a word, the Annex set made the noise, furnished the excitement, the diversion, for the house. They were people to look at, people to talk about.

The Annex tables were like good society; they catered to people that had money. Some of the set had it because they had earned it; others, because they had got it; at all events they had it or they wouldn't have been in the Annex. At the smaller and "sweller" table sat John C. Allison, a lawyer, and a rising one—solicitor for the East Side Street Railway. Bowles had place there because he was as sparkling as clear water. Edward Mitchell, always "Ed.," was there because he was a marine man interested in a big fleet of steel boats, and his wife was the daughter of the president of the line. Huntington, who was good-natured and drank freely, was there because he had not yet been "fired," as Miss June put it. Bryson was there because he was a "top-notcher" and couldn't reasonably be placed anywhere else. There were three women in this com-

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pany. Miss Montague was a young woman and of nothing less than brilliant attainments; it is fair that she should be frankly described as such. She painted miniatures. She had lived with the Miss Borderlys' before she had won fame, and she had the taste afterwards to stay with them. At this table sat Mrs. Goddard. Her seat was frankly at the disposal of anyone that could win it from her, but it would have been a brave woman who should attempt to displace her in charm of talk and manner. She was immensely interesting; that was her capital, and she kept her assets intact by judicious husbanding. Of liabilities she had none, unless her husband should be thrown to the bad side. But Goddard, who had a shocking laugh and a red patch of a birthmark on his temple, was away at the mines most of the time and did not figure often on the dining-room sheet. The men liked Mrs. Goddard, and in a boarding house it is what the men like that counts; women, in the best establishments, are, after all, only tolerated.

Mrs. Ledgcott sat at this table, and she was a pleasing mystery, for nobody could tell why she sat there. It is something, however, in Chicago to "keep people guessing"—Mrs. Ledgcott kept people guessing. They guessed at how much money she had, how old she was, how long she would keep her looks and her figure, and whether her diamonds were real, and whether her divorce was justified, and whether a saint like Johnnie Ledgcott could be the own child of a woman so strong in the possibilities of the sinner.

For there was one more who sat at the swell Annex table—a child, Johnnie Ledgcott, a Chicago boy, a

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boarding-house boy, fair as ten years and careless art could make him; unspoiled because watched over by angels—what else could have saved him in a boarding house? Johnnie Ledgcott, a little soldier, a little knight, a little gentleman—Johnnie Ledgcott; he made up the table.

When Johnnie found out a new little girl had come to Miss Borderlys' he was a very happy boy. He knew nothing of sets; he knew just that she was a little girl and the loveliest he had ever seen, for each little girl succeeding the last in Johnnie's world was sweeter than she that had gone before. Ruth Eliot, indeed, would have set a hard pace for any juvenile queen. Ruth had bobbing curls, and gentleness spoke out of her. Her blue eyes were so blue that Johnnie could never be brought to believe they were really sick; and in her voice every one of his dreams came tumbling true. The first time he ever saw Ruth he asked Miss June where she lived, and after a hasty breakfast he picked up his highest priced toys, all he could stagger under, and set bravely through the dark halls across to the north end where Ruth lived. There he laid the choicest specimens at her feet. No proposals, no bargaining, no stipulations; unconditional tribute—that was Johnnie Ledgcott, and everybody loved him—except his mother, who thought she idolized him.

Johnnie had the courtesies of the Annex den, as the Allison-Bryson room was called, and that night, just before dinner, Doctor Bryson, while dressing, was telling Johnnie of the fairy girl that lived under the very same roof without Johnnie's knowing it. It made Johnnie blush violently even to hear her name men-

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tioned, but he did not correct Doctor Bryson; he allowed him to think that *he* was the first man that had reached the North Pole. At dinner Bryson was telling Allison about her.

"She is one of the little girls you read about," said he. "I suppose she's suffered more than all of us at this table put together in all our lives, and she hardly makes a complaint. Examining her eye this morning I asked her when it hurt the most. What do you think she answered? 'When her mother was worrying about it.'"

"How sweet," murmured Mrs. Ledgcott. "Think of that, Johnnie. How good you ought to be to your mother, dear. Children don't often think of their poor mothers like that."

"Sometimes, don't you think, it's perhaps the mother's fault?" suggested John Allison.

"Oh, doubtless," assented Mrs. Ledgcott, recognizing the justice of the suggestion with a fondly sad expression. "Some mothers, heaven knows, are selfish. Who is Mrs. Eliot, doctor?" she asked, prettily.

"One of the newcomers, I believe."

"Is she in the Annex?"

"I think not; she's in the north end."

"Oh."

"What's on to-night?" asked John Allison.

"Joy," smiled Mrs. Goddard.

"I know—it's always joy in the Annex. But what particular kind?"

"Didn't you know? We're going down to Central Music Hall with Mr. Bowles," announced Mrs. Ledg-

Doctor Bryson

cott. "You and Doctor Bryson and Miss Montague and Mrs. Goddard and I—"

"It's another of Bowles's free shows. We go to fill the house," explained Bryson. "What is it to-night, Bowles?"

"A Pole."

"What sort of a pole?"

"A matchless Pole. I take you folks to see people before anybody hears of them. A year from now this fellow will be playing at the Auditorium and the town will be raving about him. It's like letting you in on the ground floor of a great scheme; but people never appreciate these things."

"That's right," assented Bryson. "When other folks begin to talk about a thing Bowles is done with it. I've noticed that. Well, what does your man play?"

"He begins at eight fifteen and, as I understand, plays ball right from the start till ten o'clock."

"No—but what does he do?" asked Mrs. Mitchell.

"He manipulates the ivories."

"A billiard show?" exclaimed Mrs. Ledgcott in horror.

"Oh, no. It's a piano show," explained Mrs. Goddard, "and everybody is to be 'up' at seven forty-five, aren't they, Mr. Bowles?"

"On pain of paying their own car-fare."

Bryson left the table first. In the hall he met June. She stopped him.

"How'd you fix it with Kurd?" she asked with a twinkle.

"How will you fix it with your Creator for getting

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me into a scrape like that? Kurd had hydrophobia. He was going to kill me. You needn't say anything about that to Mrs. What's-her-name; she seems to be of the worrying kind, anyway."

"Mrs. Eliot? She is. She's always worrying about something or other. But she says you're just too good for anything, doctor."

"Who is Mrs. Eliot, Miss June?"

"Oh, she's a kind of pet relation of mine. Not a blood relation; just a pet relation, you know. Her mother and my aunt, Mrs. Ward, were raised together, and our folks all used to live near each other in Evans-ton—that was the way of it. Her father was a big lumber merchant and lost his money in the panic of '93. They had a big place on the Ridge and I used to go over and play with her in the sand-pile when she was a little bit of a tot like Ruth."

"Where's her husband? Dead?"

"No. But he'd a good sight better be. He married her because he thought he'd be getting a fortune. The same year they got married her father lost all his money and died. Next year Eliot left her to shift for herself with that baby on her hands—then her mother died. Grief— My godfrey, what does she want?"

The last question was shot at a passing maid who told her Miss Mary was looking for her. The doctor passed on upstairs. He came down from his room a little ahead of his party ready for the concert. Punctuality had made him; it now dominated him. Passing the folding doors of the reception-room he heard music and glanced through the portières into the dimly-lighted room. Near the piano sat Miss June listening

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to a woman who was playing; he looked twice before he recognized Mrs. Eliot.

"Good evening," he said, entering during a lull, gloves and hat in hand. Mrs. Eliot wheeled and nodded simply. "Come in; nobody but us," said June. "Go ahead; play that queer piece I like. This is the first time she has played for me in a month," complained June to the doctor. Mrs. Eliot smiled at her. "I haven't felt much like playing lately. You suggested keeping Ruth as cheerful as possible," she explained to the doctor in an undertone. "This is for her benefit."

"I should have suggested your keeping me cheerful if I had known you could play like that," he remarked, sitting down. "Please don't stop. Where is Ruth?" he added, looking around. She was in the front parlor sitting very quietly with Johnnie Ledgcott. The doctor started.

"Oh, ho, Johnnie Ledgcott," cried he, pointing his finger. "You're a sly one. I was trying to tell him before dinner about a new little girl in the house, and I'll bet he knows more about her than I do. And he never peeped a word. What have you to say now, Johnnie?"

Johnnie looked conscious, but there appeared nothing for him to say, so he said nothing. Something always happens for people as sensible as that. Bryson, waiting to hear more music, abandoned the inquiry. Mrs. Eliot, reluctant to continue, seemed unwilling to appear ungracious.

Turning again to the keys, one of her hands rippled haltingly through the treble, lingered a moment over

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a seventh, then settling on the stool she brought up her left hand and her fingers followed one another into a rolling, uneven melody that grew into something like a spell. The music absorbed her. She fell into the rhythm herself and she ran from phrase to phrase till it ran quite away from her fingers. She broke, shook her head impatiently, bent in a pretty protest and her fingers flew again into the troublesome passage. She assailed it this time with a perfect burst of strength and feeling, and rounded it with a sudden effectiveness that brought Bryson's hair up standing. Then her hands drew in the last runs, danced into the final chords, stopped. With bent head, her eyes on the keys and her hands folded, she sat silent. Bryson felt a pleased astonishment, something full in his throat. Surprise, admiration, gratification, crowded upon him.

"That's really great," he stammered.

"Isn't it?" echoed June, clapping her hands. "It's a burning shame you won't play oftener," she cried indignantly. Mrs. Eliot swung on the stool while they continued to exclaim. There was more light in her face than usual. "Oh, play that over again," Doctor Bryson begged. She smiled at something June was saying and looked over his head. "I think your party is in the hall," she ventured.

"Never mind them; keep right on," he urged. While she demurred Mrs. Goddard and Mrs. Ledgcott in their wraps walked in, followed by Allison and Bowles. There were introductions. Ruth was called forward. Bryson told his story on Johnnie, and Mrs. Eliot told how he had brought over his toys, and he had such nice ones, she said.

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"He says you gave them to him, doctor," said Ruth, softly; and all laughed at the doctor, at least all but Mrs. Ledgcott. She urged the party to hasten on and join Miss Montague, who, she reminded them, would be waiting at the drug store.

At the concert Bryson sat next to Mrs. Ledgcott. She watched eagerly for the appearance of the great pianist. The audience was not large. Bryson, alone of his party, did not grow enthusiastic as the playing proceeded; the recalls began early, but the great Polish artist fought shy of them. Near the close of the programme he did respond, and when he reappeared the house was on its feet. Hardly acknowledging the ovation, he went straight to the piano, and after a confident storm of chords broke into the very piece Mrs. Eliot had played in the parlor. It lifted Bryson almost out of his chair.

"What is that?" he asked, abruptly, as the pianist's head nodded queerly at the piano and the air about them grew white with handkerchiefs. "What was that piece he played, Mrs. Ledgcott?" he shouted through the din.

"Why, I don't know," cried Mrs. Ledgcott, her baby face close to his. "Just look at the people. Did you ever in your life see anything like it?" she panted. Bowles certainly was vindicated; but Bryson persisted in his question. He kept asking till a gentleman in front turned around. "You mean the last piece? the encore? That was 'The Flatterer' by Chaminade."

"The Flutterer—"

"Flatterer."

"Flatterer. Thank you, sir." Then he told every-

Doctor Bryson

body in his party what it was and asked if they ever heard anything like it in their lives. But it was only to Miss June next morning that he insisted Mrs. Eliot had played it a good deal better than the man the papers were talking about.

He went down-town that morning thinking about Mrs. Eliot's playing. When he reached his office he looked first at the chair where she had sat the day before. When he took off his coat he was asking himself when he should see her again to tell her how well she played and to talk about "The Flatterer." The thought suggested Ruth and her eye. He realized now that the first time he had looked at it—Kurd had brought her in once and asked for his opinion—he had concluded she would go blind. Glaucoma is a frightful thing and he could not, of a sudden, understand how he came to express a different opinion; how he came to agree even to attempt to save the eye. She probably would, he felt, go blind. First, after the iridectomy, the right eye; then the left; they sometimes went that way. How many years, how many months? he mused vacantly to himself.

Brushing his hair, he saw his face in the mirror and looked at his features critically and with a new curiosity. He walked to the washstand and began washing his hands. She was married, and, of course, nothing to him—but who was her husband, he wondered, that couldn't or wouldn't provide for a woman like her and a child like Ruth. He himself, he reflected, was making from a thousand to two thousand dollars a month; one month, that was the biggest he had ever had, forty-two hundred dollars. That was the month he had

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operated on the eye of a Montana copper man. The check was a surprise, for his fee was one thousand dollars and the check had come for twenty-five hundred. He had asked more that morning of June about Mrs. Eliot. Was she divorced? No, June had said, not divorced. And thinking, Bryson kept washing, washing, washing, his hands. It was such a resolute pleasure, hand washing. While the water ran warm and free his thoughts ran in a stream. He washed his hands a hundred times a day, for sometimes he cast up matters as often as that with himself and there was the constant danger of infection. But her eyes; such eyes that woman had. He knew something about eyes—ought to, he thought—they were finer than Ruth's even, though Ruth had her mother's eyes. Could that child's eye be saved? he asked himself, wiping his hands. He rubbed his fingers till they were white and hard. Then looking at the clock he went over his finger-nails very fast with his file. His lips set as he put it away presently, shut the toilet cabinet and opened the door of the lecture-room. The morning was fine, the class large. He bowed and looked at the nurses and assistants seated, waiting, asked for a patient and turned to scan the instrument trays, when suddenly he thought of the toe of Mrs. Eliot's boot as she had sat at the piano stool with her hands folded in her lap. It was the toe of one boot. He had never seen the other, but there may be a dangerous symmetry even in the toe of one boot of an American woman. A wall-eyed boy was brought forward. The doctor took him in hand, and beginning with his usual talk on divergent strabismus, the sym-

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metry of Mrs. Eliot's boot recurred to him. It ran in his head right along with his dissertation and persisted until he was ready to operate. Then it had to give way to the intense concentration that he summoned to the use of his instruments.

He worked hard and fast till eleven o'clock. The next hour went to his private practice; twelve until one to another lecture. At one-thirty he lunched with John Allison at the Athletic Club and learned the particulars of the new five million stock issue of the East Side Street Railway Company, which was to be divided as a bonus at par among stockholders pro rata. John pronounced it a good thing and Bryson, when they left the dining-room, was going to tell his broker to buy fifty shares of the stock in the morning, but John asked him not to telephone: to walk around to La Salle Street and give the order verbally so there wouldn't be even a danger of publicity. It was a small matter, true, but there were unnumbered tailers listening for tips, and John Allison was known to be high in the company policy.

From La Salle Street, where Bryson left John, he walked to his office and went to the library. He read till six o'clock and went in to dinner at Miss Borderlys' late. Dining, he was uncommunicative and he denied himself the card party in Mrs. Ledgcott's room that evening, going instead straight upstairs to the den. He fixed himself in a Morris chair before the fire with a book. His capacity for research was enormous, for at half-past eleven, when John came up, he was reading. John, after a cigar, went to bed and to sleep; he woke and Bryson was reading. It was one o'clock. John

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got up for a glass of water, but neither spoke. He slept and woke again. The student lamp was burning. Bryson's books lay in a heap on the floor and he sat with his legs crossed before the dying fire, his head supported wearily on his hand. Six hours of reading one hour to con it all. Not new stuff; he had gone over it many times before. Little, so little, new; much, so much, old, so unsatisfactory; so little fact, so much theory; so little absolute, so much relative. Grim, mysterious, deadly disease. It was not of the mother he was thinking in the midnight—except to think of her asleep over in the brick house, asleep while he pondered. It was not of her eyes, strangely awe inspiring; not of her hand in her lap; of her hair vaguely curling about her ears, that he was thinking, but of the spectre that brooded over the eyes of her child—the spectre of glaucoma.

CHAPTER VI.

AT half-past seven next morning Bryson walked in to breakfast as fresh as sunshine. Of the women of their table Mrs. Ledgcott alone was down. Undemoralized by boarding-house ease, Mrs. Ledgcott breakfasted early with the men. After a late outing she was particularly betimes, and usually a soft-tinted negligee supported her delicate, regular face as a vase offers a flower that is rare. From such a setting she toyed with her coffee, a mute and lovely reproach for the dissipations of the night.

On this occasion Doctor Bryson didn't rise to the small talk. Mrs. Ledgcott, always amiable, chatted with John. Once only Bryson broke from his fruit and reflections; that was to ask June to bring Mrs. Eliot right after breakfast to the reception-room. When he went up to wait for her he found her in her hat and street suit already there. From the edge of the chair on which she sat she rose with the promptness that is in itself a compliment. "Miss June told me you wished to speak with me, doctor."

"Good morning. How do you do? I wanted to talk about Ruth; and I wanted June to be here."

"She came, but she was called away. Will you not let me see if I can't find her quickly?" Mrs. Eliot hurried downstairs, and with what was evidently a forced levy brought June back.

Doctor Bryson

"I am clear in my mind this morning as to what I shall recommend in Ruth's case," began Bryson, addressing Mrs. Eliot.

"Yes, doctor."

"If anything is to be done, it should be done at once, you understand, do you not?"

"Yes, doctor. You would have an operation?"

"I should."

"Will you do it yourself, doctor?" asked June with honeyed pleading.

"I have said I would if Mrs. Eliot wishes it."

"Oh, doctor, I do wish it, if you only will."

Her readiness seemed to arouse some apprehension on his part. "Stop a bit," he interrupted, raising his eyes. "What I propose differs radically from what Kurd and the men you tell me have seen her propose."

"They said there was but one thing to do; an iridectomy."

"Iridectomy is the usual operation in such cases."

"What do you propose, doctor?"

"Jonnesco's operation."

"It is serious," he continued, after a pause. "The operation does not touch the eye itself. It consists in removing the nerve that controls the secretions of the eye. To get it I should have to go into her neck below and behind the ear and dissect it out—do you understand?"

Her lips formed the words, "Yes, doctor," but she was so frightened her voice could not utter them. Her eyes devoured his thought and expression, and she put her hand to her belt for her handkerchief and wiped her dry lips.

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"It is an exceedingly delicate point to operate at—turn around, Miss June," he said, continuing. He lifted June's hair away with one hand and with his thumb indicated an incision on the side of her neck. "Here is where the nerve ganglion I should remove lies. It is sheathed close to the pneumogastric nerve and the carotid artery; of course, it's somewhat delicate business getting in just there."

"Is the operation performed often, doctor?" Mrs. Eliot asked, haltingly.

"No, it is a Continental experiment. It has been done a few times in this country; not many. In Chicago, once."

"But you have confidence in it, haven't you, doctor?" interposed June.

"Naturally."

"You say it has been done here once, doctor?" faltered Mrs. Eliot.

"Yes."

"Who performed it?" asked June.

"It was done at the College."

"Successfully?"

"So far as we could tell. Improvement was evident; unfortunately, the patient—he was a stationary engineer—lost his life a month afterward in a boiler explosion and left only an interrogation point on the records."

"Now, doctor, if you could get the man who did that operation to help you in this one," suggested June, craftily.

"I should be compelled," returned Bryson, dryly, "to rely on him to some extent."

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"Who is he?"

"One of our staff surgeons."

Mrs. Eliot spoke. "If it is your belief that this will save her sight—"

His eyes fell and he put up his hand. "It is only a hope. There are many chances against us, Mrs. Eliot."

"Then I prefer to commit Ruth entirely into your hands." Something of agony in her eyes could not entirely be hidden. "You will do what is best," she faltered.

"What to me seems best," he carefully substituted. "Just so you understand we are taking a hard chance. Let her eat lightly to-day, give her a good dinner to-night, nothing afterwards, and have her at the College," he looked at his watch as he rose to go, "at seven o'clock to-morrow morning, fasting."

He had hardly gone before June began to cry. Mrs. Eliot made her usual preparations to go down-town to teach; operations, she knew, cost money. But for June there was no work. She "cut" everything that day; took Ruth over on the avenue and filled her with enough candy and soda-water to set Bryson crazy had he known. "But how is *he* to know?" meditated June slyly. "Poor little thing," she murmured to herself; "she doesn't know what's ahead of her. Have another soda, dear."

If Mrs. Eliot failed that day to give value received to her pupils it was not because she did not faithfully strive to; and at all events her pupils loved her. If they did not, why should they take lessons of her when the town was full of music teachers that gloried in the most unpronounceable sorts of names? Coming home

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that night, she tried conscientiously to give Ruth a good dinner, and did not quite understand why the child's appetite had failed. She tucked the little thing in bed, and after sitting by her a long, long time she slipped in beside her. She did not see Doctor Bryson that night; he was out with an Annex party at the theatre and when they came in it was late. Mrs. Eliot knew it must be some of the Annex people, for they were noisy and jolly, and none but the Annexers dared make a noise in the house after midnight. Then the street grew quiet. There was only the rumble of an occasional carriage, and darkness, swimming with thought; the church clock chiming two o'clock; three o'clock; four o'clock; then in a doze five o'clock, and it was time to get up and make ready.

She was on hand at the receiving-room with June and Ruth promptly at seven. Jim, the colored boy, took them into the office. The operation was to take place in a private room off it. A number of surgeons, some of them sleepy-eyed, were washing their hands and putting on their gowns, while two nurses prepared the instrument stand.

Presently Bryson walked in, slipped off his driving gloves as he bade all good morning, and shook hands with Ruth. A young surgeon, passing, he stopped to introduce to Mrs. Eliot and June. "Doctor Hoxie," said Bryson, informally, "my very particular reliance," at which the two women who could not do otherwise smiled, and Doctor Hoxie protested. "Who is he?" asked June, peering after Doctor Hoxie as he walked away.

"My assistant this morning," explained Bryson,

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briefly. "A coming man, too. If you ever go wrong, June, send for Doctor Hoxie. Ruth hasn't had anything to eat, has she?"

"No, doctor," answered Mrs. Eliot.

Leaving them, he spoke to the nurses and went to the wash-room. Though she had seen an operating-room but once before, everything going forward had a strangely familiar look to Mrs. Eliot. Her perceptions, keyed painfully high, were awake to everything: the methodical dispatch of the nurses, the lightness of their numberless steps, the neatness of their caps and gowns, the deliberations of the doctors, the give-and-take air of their smiling talk as they manicured their finger-nails, dusted specks off their waistcoats and shook their trousers into better form over their shoes. It was hard to realize that this agony to her meant something of a treat to them—a star operation by a star man to which the favored few of both staffs were glad to be bidden—an unusual experiment in which the chief surgeon of the eye believed.

Already the nurses were preparing Ruth. Mrs. Eliot, like one who could not give up her own, watched anxiously, helped with failing sight to bind up the child's pretty hair, waited while they scrupulously cleansed her neck, and, like one who mourns, clasped her hands in silence as they laid her on the operating table. The nurses waited a moment while Ruth's arms, as her mother bent hungrily, stole around her neck and the two, in a look and a whisper, kissed. A strange assistant, with a smile, brought the Esmarch mask over Ruth's face, and as the mother stepped trembling back the sweetness of the chloroform, dripping, began to

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steal the child's senses. Doctor Bryson did not notice any of this. He was washing his hands; they could see him where they sat. He washed at his hands till June went nearly mad. When at last he finished, the head nurse helped him into his gown. He sat down, and she began rapidly to bind his head in aseptic gauze. She wound it about his head, around his ears, over his forehead, went quite around his head again with the roll and brought a wide band across his mouth. Doctor Hoxie handed him a pair of thin rubber gloves with gauntlets, and he drew them deliberately over his hands.

Mrs. Eliot and June, where they sat in the office, could see the surgeon that was giving the chloroform lift the mask from Ruth's nose and retract an eyelid with his thumb. They saw him lift the child's hand from its side and let it drop, study its pulse, observe its respiration a moment and nod toward Doctor Bryson, who was coming forward. Mrs. Eliot, watching narrowly, saw Bryson bend over the operating table and look intently at Ruth, while the surgeon giving the anæsthetic told him of her pulse. He made no comment, but silent and intent motioned the nurse to turn Ruth's head, looked a moment at her neck, felt of it thoughtfully and paused. Mrs. Eliot, straining, caught even his first words—"A knife, please."

The white-gowned figures and the big plate window wavered and swayed in her eyes. She bit her lip. She could not see the delicate neck bared and stretched now under the gloved fingers, and after one instant of deliberation the bright blade dividing the pink flesh, the blood welling behind the steel and the thirsty sponge following through the incision like an eraser. "Tissue

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forceps, please," she heard in the low, even tones. "Tissue forceps," again, and after a time, "The retractors; not those—the small ones."

She could not look. Deadly fear cramped her senses and there came a time of craning of heads close over her child, the vision of nurses rapidly passing instruments; passing sponges—sometimes dry, sometimes hurriedly wrung in water—and sometimes she was conscious of imperatively quick words in the same steady voice, "Hotter, hotter, nurse; hotter. Now, gentlemen," she heard, after a maddening silence, "tell me what nerve we have here. Don't all speak at once." The tone was so easy that life seemed to come with it back to her heart. She looked. Doctor Bryson stood on the opposite side of the table, and between the assistants she caught sight of his eyes and nose framed in the queer bandages, and a new sensation swept over her: an impulse to go to him and beg for mercy on Ruth. "She is my child," she would have said, "have mercy on her if you love me." The insane thought startled her as it flashed through her mind, and she wondered how it could have come. But there was some fascination about his eyes, and she felt that if she asked of him mercy he would not refuse it. Fear gave way; it was only the waiting now that oppressed her; she knew Ruth would not die.

Shaking off the trance, Mrs. Eliot looked around for June; June had left her; she was alone. The dissection went torturously slow. The surgeon was working now as one treads tiptoe at a sleeper's ear. It was not now the blade of his knife that parted the welling tissue; oftener the knife handle or his gloved finger

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itself opened a step along the blind path that hid the ganglion of the cervical sympathetic. He was working where the functions of human organism begin; where a prick meant instant death to the child under his blade. In another moment the mysterious wandering nerve, giant of its kind, the pneumogastric nerve, source of every vital function in this perfect living structure whose existence was in his hand, hung limp upon his tiny hook, and the great carotid artery, streaming up the unconscious neck, throbbed slowly under his thoughtful finger. He delved at the seat of life itself.

About the table there was absolute silence. Straining eyes, motionless watching. Advancement, difficulty, deliberation on the operator's part—and then, of a sudden, from the little patient, violent and unexpected retching that made the watchers look grave. June's kindness of the day before was bearing fruit. Bryson, unwilling, stood forced to suspend his work at its critical stage. He showed his first uneasiness standing back while they tried to quiet his patient. The pulse fluttered; hemorrhages welling anew defied control. Sponges, scalding hot, were thrown into the gap like tiny sandbags into a crevasse; artery forceps clicked till they hung thick as silver leeches along the lips of the wound; it was the anxious moment. Gradually the troublesome stomach was brought under control, dissection went cautiously forward; the thread-like nerve Doctor Bryson sought lay at last uncovered.

"There it is," he said to those about him, and with it lying on his hook he told them why he knew it. **Seizing the superior ganglion, the one he wanted, on**

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his forceps, he divided the nerve at its exit from the skull and drew the ganglion out.

When Mrs. Eliot could again think connectedly a smiling nurse was fanning her. Ruth, bandaged, lay with closed eyes on the office couch; Doctor Bryson was washing his hands. Mrs. Eliot, turning to Ruth, heard a surgeon congratulating him.

"I thought your first Jonnesco operation was good, doctor," he was saying; "I swear, I believe this one was prettier."

CHAPTER VII

“**H**OW is that little girl you operated on last week, doctor?” asked Miss Montague at dinner one night. “Ruth Eliot, is that her name?”

“Ruth Eliot,” supplied Mrs. Goddard from her salad. It was deemed at the Annex table a bit of etiquette to be up on Bryson’s star cases.

“She’s largely out of my keeping,” answered Doctor Bryson.

“Oh, how so?”

“Ruth’s in the hands of my silent partner.”

“Who’s your silent partner?” asked Mrs. Ledgcott, somewhat impatiently. “I didn’t know you had a silent partner.”

“He’s riddling,” observed Mrs. Goddard, sagely.

“I have a silent partner; and that considerably the more important member of the firm.”

“Who is it?”

“Nature. I’m glad to say Ruth’s doing well in Nature’s hands. I took her vision yesterday. She already reads within two lines of normal. Ruth deserves it; she’s a model patient. Good patients should all have harps; and if they keep them for good patients there will be plenty to go around, too.”

“I’m enthusiastic over her mother,” exclaimed Mrs. Goddard. “I think she deserves a harp for the care she takes of that child. Mrs. Eliot is charming.”

Doctor Bryson

"Wrapped up in her little girl," commented Miss Montague. "She is a fairylike thing."

"Talk about miniatures," exclaimed Bryson. "There's a subject for you, Miss Montague."

"The world is full of subjects—if one only could use them all!"

"If only they all had the money," laughed Mrs. Ledgcott.

"If I could afford it I would paint a child like that for nothing!" returned Miss Montague, bridleing; "I think I've done my share of that kind of thing. If I didn't have bills to pay I would never paint anything but children in the world."

"You must like children," purred Mrs. Ledgcott, softly.

"I love them," exclaimed Mary Montague, coldly reckless, looking straight at her tormentor.

"Good for you," interposed Bryson, bluntly. "So do I."

"Just as if a man could really love a child as a woman does," sighed Mrs. Ledgcott, reproachfully, and she looked at Johnnie, for she was what stage carpenters would call a quick shift. "Oh, doctor, doctor! Are you going to play cards to-night?" she asked, brightening with an effort.

"Where?"

"My rooms," announced Mrs. Goddard; "everybody at eight sharp—and I've asked Mrs. Eliot up."

"Does Mrs. Eliot play poker?" asked John Allison.

"If she doesn't we'll teach her," promised Mrs. Goddard.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," declared

Doctor Bryson

Bryson. "You women will corrupt everybody in the house."

"We never corrupted you, doctor."

When Bryson called later to see Ruth, June was with her mother.

"Go? Of course you'll go," insisted June when Bryson arrived. "She's asked up to Mrs. Goddard's rooms this evening and she doesn't want to go. Doctor, you make her go. She's hung around this room with Ruth till you can see the bones in her fingers without any rays. She never goes anywhere but down to her music room and from dinner up here to bed. She's never visited anybody in the whole house. You'll be sick—that's what *you'll* be," stormed June as the doctor laughed and went into the bedroom to talk to Ruth.

"You will have to break away from your room occasionally," put in Bryson, returning after a while. "You make a capital nurse, Mrs. Eliot, but you'll be down yourself if you don't get a change once in a while."

June, reënforced, bore down harder. Ruth added a pretty word. "I don't need you, mamma, to put me to sleep. I'll think about that poor little girl Doctor Bryson told me about that walked sideways all the time, and after he put glasses on her she walked just as straight as anything."

Mrs. Eliot gave way. It was nearly nine o'clock when she knocked lightly at Mrs. Goddard's door. The card party was in blast. Bowles, Bryson, Mrs. Ledgcott and Mrs. Goddard before the fire in the grate were playing poker, and Miss Montague, whose apartments adjoined, sat near John Allison. John was poring over some miniatures she had brought in.

Doctor Bryson

"Late, but you are forgiven if you've brought an excuse," said Mrs. Goddard, cordially, to the new arrival.

Mrs. Eliot stood disconcerted on the threshold. The rooms were highly lighted, the faces at the table flushed, and there was sally and retort and the laughing that makes an outsider ill at ease. The men rose instantly. "Come right in and right over here—you know almost everybody—oh, yes; Miss Montague, shake hands with Mrs. Eliot, as Mr. Bowles says, and Mr. Bowles, if you will behave, you may shake hands with Mrs. Eliot yourself. And the others I am sure you know; and the game is poker and the limit a quarter, except for a jack-pot, when Mr. Bowles and Mrs. Ledgcott stay. Then the roof goes."

"I am sorry to be stupid, but I don't understand poker, Mrs. Goddard. Let me join Miss Montague."

"Oh, no; we're going to teach you poker. It won't take but a minute—"

Allison groaned. "Poor Robinson Crusoe," he sighed, looking sympathetically at the victim.

"Let her come over here with me," cried Mary Montague, impulsively; but Mrs. Goddard had said. "Doctor Bryson is banker," she explained. "Sit here, Mrs. Eliot. Oh, it's easy as pie—give her some chips, doctor. Never buy over twenty-five cents' worth at a time, Mrs. Eliot, then you know where you are."

"Or where you ought to be," hinted Bowles, darkly.

The beginnings of anything are tiresome, but poker is peculiarly a game for gamesters. Mrs. Eliot struggled. The men helped because they liked the subject, and Mrs. Goddard helped because she was a philanthro-

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pist. Mrs. Ledgcott primarily wanted poker and not a primary class. Having already scented a strange kitten under her stove, she smiled prettily, and with her patient little smile she gradually broke up the game. It was bad enough to have somebody coming in to entertain her gentlemen friends, without teaching the stranger how to do it. Yet in spite of some calculations on Mrs. Ledgcott's part, quitting the table proved a mistake. She saw this the minute music was called for and John Allison sat down at the piano and sang a funny German song that made everybody hungry for more. Mrs. Goddard followed with a second song; then Bryson asked Mrs. Eliot to play "The Flatterer."

Perhaps it was not very easy in a black dress to sit comfortably at the piano with the three alert men and three handsomely gowned young women, one of them covertly unfriendly, listening. At any rate, Mrs. Eliot, ignoring the doctor's choice of a piece, attempted a ballade and it came off badly. Resisting all efforts at an encore, she left the piano embarrassed and took refuge on the couch near Mrs. Ledgcott.

"Do play something more," sighed the baby lady, earnestly; she was willing now that Mrs. Eliot should play everything she knew.

"Oh, no."

Mrs. Ledgcott feathered a tiny dart. "Doctor Bryson has spoken so highly of your touch," said she, looking with sweetness at the doctor, who crossed his legs discomposedly under the shaft. It was the taunt of a pretty face—a round, well-dressed, sweet-odored face—from a woman and to a woman who hate each other by the operation of a law very nearly divine. The pink

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of resentment rose above the plain high collar of Mrs. Eliot's dress and crept almost to her ears. Mrs. Ledgcott had made a tactical mistake.

"Oh, don't stop, Mrs. Eliot," urged Bryson, helplessly, "do play 'The Flatterer.'" Anger supplied the needed steadiness and animation. She retraced her steps to the bench, a queen in her black gown, and seated herself with a totally different air—seated herself to conquer and to charm. The piano itself was an inspiration—a "condensed grand," with a lingering tone—and the music teacher bent over the keys and in a crescendo of chords coaxed them to help her. Up she woke them, octave after octave, till the ivory danced, and with every key bobbing she broke more deftly yet—back among the black-hooded fellows, softest and sweetest—into Chaminade's bewildering melody. She held the phrases every one at her own capricious will, whirling one upon another with entire abandon, until, when her hands dropped from the keyboard, the silence for an instant was breathless.

"Mrs. Eliot, you are an artist," exclaimed John Allison first. "Isn't she, Bowles?"

"If you'll star, Mrs. Eliot, I'll write your paper myself," declared Bowles with superb conviction. "I never heard Chaminade before."

Bryson pointed an accusing finger at him. "When I came home from your concert, Bowles, and said Mrs. Eliot played that thing better than your Pole—remember?"

"I didn't know we had a pianist right here in the house," admitted Bowles. Mrs. Eliot walked more

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easily over to the couch, and Mrs. Ledgcott, cowed, scratched no more.

Next morning Mrs. Eliot called at the College and asked for Doctor Bryson. It was the first time she had been down since the operation. There was no delay now in seeing whom she wanted, no more anxious waiting about the receiving-room. A word from Bryson had changed all that. She felt like one with money in purse, sure of attention and greeting. He entered his office after she had been seated in it by Jim. He extended his hand and she gave hers; it alone was an intoxication.

"Very glad to see you. How are you this morning and how is Ruth?" he asked, heartily.

"Thank you, I am always well; and Ruth is doing so well. I can hardly tell you what a load it is off my heart."

"It is early yet, of course, to rejoice; but certainly we couldn't have asked for better results so far."

"I have come to pay you some money, doctor, on account," said Mrs. Eliot, putting some bills toward him on the table, "and I will have some more immediately after the first of the month," she added, hurriedly, rising to go.

Bryson looked doubtfully at the money. "Just a minute, Mrs. Eliot. How much have you here?"

"A hundred dollars, doctor."

"But you don't owe me that much—"

"The operation—"

"The operation is fifty dollars."

"How much?"

"Fifty dollars."

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"Oh, Doctor Bryson. How could it be only fifty dollars?"

"Because that is what I booked it at."

"Miss June told me something of what you are paid for such work. Twenty-five hundred dollars once."

"Miss June is excitable, you know. She frequently gets things mixed," he added, calmly counting out fifty dollars and pushing the rest of the money back to her. "This balances our account, and I am obliged to you for your confidence and good will. Now, really, I don't want to cause you embarrassment," he added, mildly. Her face looked shamed and her eyes turned like hares to escape his. "You must admit I am the one to name my fee. Provided it is reasonable, there should be no occasion for sensitiveness, Mrs. Eliot."

"I am sorry—to—show any," she stammered, "but I fear, doctor, you are making a nominal charge for a very great and skillful service. It is something I have no right to ask."

"You haven't asked it."

"I must somehow have asked it, or why should you give your services to me for nothing?"

"Frankly, I felt great interest in my little patient, Mrs. Eliot."

"But you are entitled to something like your usual compensation. You must let me pay you what I can—what is right."

"I have said what I honestly believe to be right. Here it is. I am satisfied. I have charged more for similar operations—I have done them for less."

"I know I should pay much more than fifty dollars, doctor." He disagreed with a smile. "Do take this

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money and I will be most grateful." He shook his head.

"You will embarrass me, Mrs. Eliot, if you insist. You will make me remember the time when a hundred dollars looked as big to me as a hundred thousand—when I should have fallen on a man's neck and wept if he had ever offered me so much money at once."

"Won't you take at least what I have brought, doctor?"

He laughed. "I wouldn't take this much if you weren't so set on it. Let me give you a receipt—"

"Oh, that is not at all necessary."

"Oh, yes it is, if you please. If you have your way and make me take the money I shall have mine and make you take a receipt."

"But I haven't had my way," she protested, through a rainbow of mist. "It is you who have had your way, is it not? I think I should have mine about the receipt."

"All right, you shall. Let it go."

"It would make me uncomfortable to take a receipt. Without one I can still feel, whether you admit it or not, that I owe you a great deal of money."

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Not especially."

He hesitated. "Will you let me ask your judgment about a present I am trying to make?"

"A present?"

"A wedding present to a friend of my youthful days," he said, playfully. "I've been putting it off until the last day has come, and I'm in a cold perspiration over it."

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"Oh, a wedding present ought not to be so difficult."

"By Jove, I find it so. What could you suggest?"

"Something in silver or books—or how would an engraving do? Much depends on the taste of the one you give to. You could choose a dozen nice things in an hour. Nice china, or even table linen is always acceptable. Is it a relative? I presume you give to the bride."

"Exactly. If it were to the groom I could manage it. No, she's not a relation, but she might as well be. I think a great deal of her father and of her, too. Her mother and my mother died at almost the same time when we were children up in a little Wisconsin town. Her father was the big man of the town in those days and she was the belle. My mother was poor and I used to have to go barefoot most of the time," said Bryson, candidly reminiscent. "One day there were a lot of boys and girls playing pull-away over in her big yard, and I was hanging along outside the fence just hungry to be asked in to play, and, by George, she asked me in. I suppose I looked pretty shabby; anyway, one of the boys refused to stay if I played, and said something about my clothes. I was so crushed I couldn't even fight—then—though among boys I took care of such matters tolerably well. But to get hit in that way among girls was too much for me. I stood there like a ninny, ready to cry, but she turned on the brute like a little hurricane and came over and stood by me, and, would you believe it, ordered the other fellow out of the yard. Wasn't that brave? That's the kind of girl she was. I couldn't forget that." He talked so rapidly and with so quiet a frank-

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ness that he engaged interest and sympathy. "Now I'm trying to select a wedding present," he concluded, "for that girl; and it's got to be done to-day."

"I see."

"There's nothing too good for girls like her, and you'd hardly believe it—with all the money her father had he has lost every cent."

"Oh, yes; I can believe it."

"Every cent—in '93—and if it hadn't been for a bright young lawyer up there that took hold when all the men her father had made rich had deserted him, by Jove, they'd have sold the roof over his head. That's the man she's going to marry—the lawyer—and he's a fine fellow."

"I think that is lovely."

"But the change in their circumstances seems, somehow, to have broken a good deal of her spirit. She was a quick, courageous girl when I knew her—full of impulse and confidence. Her husband has a good country legal practice, but that isn't a fortune, you know, and he supports his parents, too. So I want to give her something worth while, that's the fact of it. Do you know anything about diamonds?"

"A little."

"Well, I don't know a thing," he declared, opening a drawer, "except that when I wanted a diamond I never had money enough to buy one, and now for myself I've lost my wild desire about them. But I thought earrings would be nice for her. What do you think of those?" He handed her a jewel case containing a pair of solitaire stones. She took them, not able entirely to suppress a little exclamation. "I got them at

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Mattson's," he went on, watching her expression. "They said they weren't wearing diamonds as much as they used to, but they said these were right of their kind."

"Right!" echoed Mrs. Eliot, catching her breath. "Indeed, I should think they were—quite right. They are superb," she continued, slowly; "lustre, color, size."

"I don't care much about whether they're in fashion. I want to give her something permanent. What do you think of them for the purpose?"

"They would be a splendid gift for anyone."

"I mean do you think I could improve on them in some other way as a gift? I don't know a thing about wedding presents."

Mrs. Eliot sat with her gloved finger crooked upon her lip. He was so simple in his questions that her manner was of amused interest.

"Are they—the most practical thing you could send her under the circumstances?" she suggested, reflectively.

"I don't know. That's what I wanted to ask you. What do you think?"

"Under the circumstances you have mentioned—while these are queenly—perhaps you could give your friend something more useful to her, don't you think?"

"They are not the most useful thing in the world, but they are staple. They tell me that diamonds are just as convertible as government bonds."

"But, doctor, she wouldn't sell diamonds that you gave her."

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"Why—no, I suppose not—unless, of course, she needed the money very much—"

"Oh, never in the world. There are some things in life even necessity can't compel. She would not sell those—ever."

"After all, there may not be much of a point in the convertibility, though it sounded plausible when they talked of it. Well, if I don't give her these, I've got to find something else to-day," he added, with alarm; "what is it going to be?"

"Why, send the earrings, doctor. Don't let me unsettle your mind. I ought not even to have made a suggestion after all your trouble in picking them out."

"Oh, yes, you ought; I wanted a woman's judgment or I shouldn't have asked. But now I've got to find something else, and I'll be hanged if I know what it shall be." He looked perplexedly at Mrs. Eliot.

"What are her tastes?" she inquired, doubtfully.

"I suppose I ought to know—but I don't. She has changed so. I wrote her the other day to ask her what I should send—"

"You did?"

"Yes. Wasn't that right?"

"Of course it was right; but odd. What did she say?"

"Here is her letter," he replied, taking an envelope from his pocket. "What can you make out of it. She seems all broken up about the trouble they've had." Mrs. Eliot opened the letter.

"My dear Harry," she read, "I did not mean to write you of my marriage at all. But since father has told you and you have written me so good and so kind a

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letter, what can I do but thank you again and again for your wishes for my happiness.

"It is like you, who remember so well, to speak as you do of father's little kindnesses to you at school. How long ago it seems, yet you are only twenty-eight and I only twenty-six. It seems as if I cannot grow old. Sometimes I pray that I might in the night go to sleep young and wake old with the hard things all done, or that I might sleep on till that other morning. But out of all the wreck, all that you know—and more than you know—one thing remains—duty. And my duty it is that I try now to do and that I pray for strength to do when I pray nightly for you and for your happiness. Surely you, if anyone, deserve happiness.

"You ask what you can send me that I would best like on my wedding day. Send me just word that you are happy and it will help me to be. You will like my husband when you meet him, as you must sometime. He is honest and strong and true, and because he has asked it now so long, knowing as he knows all my heart, and because father, who is very feeble, asks it, I am going to try to make him happy—God helping me. Good-by! JESSIE M. B. LAWSON."

"Oh, Doctor Bryson!"

"What is it?"

"This is a sad letter. I shouldn't have seen this—"

"Pray, why not?"

"It is a strange letter."

"I know it—what am I to do? There isn't much to guide me, is there? You can see how depressed she is about their trouble and how mixed up I am. But I

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am beginning to see these are not the thing," he said, reluctantly, contemplating the diamonds.

"She isn't musical, is she? I always think of that first," suggested Mrs. Eliot, apologetically.

"She is, intensely; of course she is—"

"Has she a piano?"

"By Jove, they sold their piano—"

"If you are going to send as large a sum as these mean—why not a piano?" she asked, doubtfully.

He struck the table lightly. "I never thought of it. How stupid. A piano is the very thing. I'll send her a piano. It's what she would like above all things," he declared, putting the letter in his pocket.

"Will they take back the earrings?"

"Oh, I think so," he said, throwing them into a drawer and locking it. "I can manage that afterward. The manager up there is a patient of mine, and if he doesn't do what's right I'll make him suffer. A piano. Now what kind? An upright or one of those three-cornered affairs like Mrs. Goddard's would be about right, wouldn't it? I don't know anything about a piano either. Would you help me select one, Mrs. Eliot? But you wouldn't have time, would you?"

It was impossible to resist his impulsiveness—impulsiveness of a kind that whirled things, with a good-humored begging, to a conclusion. "I think I have time," she assented, "if you would dare take my judgment."

"Dare?" he echoed, starting to his feet. "Glad to get it. Can you go now? Good. Yes, Jessie loves music—but she can't play like you," he added, bluntly, throwing things into drawers and touching a button

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as he made ready to leave. Jim opened the door.
"Cab, Jim."

"Oh, don't take a cab; we can walk, doctor," said Mrs. Eliot.

He considered quickly. "No? Shall we? As you say. No matter, Jim," said he, slipping into the top coat Jim held for him. "If you are ready," he added, bowing to Mrs. Eliot as she rose, "we will go right along. Miss Martin," he said, passing her desk in the receiving-room as he followed Mrs. Eliot, "I won't be back till two o'clock."

CHAPTER VIII

“IF you’ll behave yourself now, Ruth,” said Bryson one evening, “you’ll be all right; but keep away from boys with Roman candles and firecrackers. She read normal to-day—twenty-twentieths.” June and he were sitting with Mrs. Eliot in her room. Ruth stood between his knees.

“My!” exclaimed June, looking at Ruth, “listen to that, child! You ought to be mighty good to him, I tell you. Let’s see how your eye looks.”

“There’s quite a scar on her neck,” said the doctor, regretfully. “Couldn’t help that; it won’t show when she’s older. I think now with ordinary care she is going to get along.”

“How is she ever to show her gratitude for it all, Doctor Bryson?” asked Mrs. Eliot, with the repression that carries intense sincerity. He laughed, slightly, “By taking good care of her eyes.”

“Doctor,” called June, blinking mischievously at him as he rose to leave, “I’m almost inclined to let you try to fix my eye, I declare.”

Ruth followed the doctor, as she always did, out into the hall, clinging to his arm and skipping at his side. In a minute she came running back.

“See, mamma,” she cried, holding up her arm; “see what Doctor Bryson gave me! Because I was such a good patient, he said.”

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"What did he give you?" exclaimed June, tempestuously. "Not that bracelet?"

"Yes; just now."

"Why, Ruth," cried her mother.

"Land sakes," exclaimed June. "Gold! Well, he wouldn't be likely to give her anything else, would he?"

"Oh, I wish he hadn't done this," said Mrs. Eliot, looking in distress at the pretty band. "He ought not to have done it."

"Why not?" bridled June. "He's got plenty of money. He's giving somebody something all the time; why not her?"

"But he gives her such an expensive thing," protested Mrs. Eliot.

"That's nothing for him. Why, he gave Johnnie Ledgcott a watch last Christmas that must have cost twenty-five dollars. He doesn't think anything of that. His folks are all dead and he just loves children; my gracious, you can see that with half an eye. He thinks more this minute of Johnnie Ledgcott than his mother does," declared June as Ruth danced the bangle up and down her wrist and capered around her mother.

"Did you thank him, Ruth?" asked her mother.

"I told him I loved him, mamma, and he kissed me," blushed Ruth. "Can I go show it to Johnnie, mamma?"

"Not to-night, dear; it's time to go to bed now;" and June gossiped until it was time for Ruth to say her prayers; she always got out when prayers began. Either an evil spirit moved, or a good spirit pricked, within her—she got away. When she made her escape

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Ruth was kneeling straight up in bed, pink from throat to foot, pink where the blood lighted her cheeks and tinged her ears, white where the "nighty" fell away from her neck, and brown where the curls tumbled over her eyes. She knelt and tried hard to say, "Now I lay me," without thinking at every word of the heavy hoop on her wrist, and trying to shut her eyes so that even peeping under the long lashes she could not see the dazzling yellow of it in the gas light.

"Do you realize, Doctor Bryson," said Mrs. Eliot in the hall next morning, "that you are tyrannically generous."

"How so?"

"You know very well. When Ruth came in with her bracelet last night I was absolutely overcome. After your care and trouble and taking only a nominal fee for it all and then—"

"You are thinking about that fee all the time. In buying something for Ruth I gratified myself. And it's like that piano last summer," he laughed, "I can't help it. I don't buy much, but when I do buy I like to get the best. They told me at Mattson's that bracelet was all right; is it? Did you look at it?"

"I am ashamed to tell you how exquisite I think it."

"I'm glad I struck it once. To tell you the truth, I have the worst taste in the world, and I have nobody to educate me in these things."

"I am sure your taste is excellent."

"But, with the very best you can say—undeveloped."

"No matter; compliments do not spoil you, do they?"

"I never get any."

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"You have in your disposition the foundation of all taste—unselfishness." He bowed quite happy. "But in your manifestations of it—such as the last—be merciful, not overpowering." Her eyes opened an instant to ask forgiveness for the ventured appeal, then closed to their usual half light. But it was not the half light he carried away with him; it was the passing burst that left its image on his heart, as the retina at evening is stamped by a fire of sun from a twilight of clouds.

Entering her room a few minutes afterward, Mrs. Eliot had just closed the door when she heard a tap. She turned. It was Mrs. Ledgcott.

"Why, how do you do? Come in."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Eliot—how do you do? I wanted to see you for just a minute. Isn't it a perfectly lovely morning? Ruth, dear, how are you?"

"Sit down, Mrs. Ledgcott," requested Mrs. Eliot, amiably easy. Ruth rather stared, for Mrs. Ledgcott had never before in all the months of the acquaintance learned just where Mrs. Eliot roomed.

"I am going away for a couple of days, Mrs. Eliot; up into Wisconsin on a little coaching trip, don't you know. I wanted to ask if Johnnie may not spend part of his time with Ruth while I am gone. Just till Monday, you know. The dear little fellow is quite out of sorts, and if I hadn't promised I shouldn't go; but I *hate* to break up a party, don't you know? Will he bother you, Mrs. Eliot?"

As Johnnie spent all available time—which meant every minute his mother couldn't keep him away from her—with Ruth, anyway, there was hardly more than the form to go through.

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"Certainly not. We are always glad to have Johnnie. It is you, I fear, who have cause for impatience because he is here so much," smiled Mrs. Eliot. She could not resist a gentle thrust.

"Only on your account, dear Mrs. Eliot. I'm sure he burdens you too much, but the dear little fellow is so fond of Ruth it seems hopeless to try to keep him away. I hope he won't tire you to-morrow. You must not let him. Just send him over to the Annex the minute he becomes a nuisance, won't you, please? So I shan't worry about his annoying you. I shall leave strict injunctions with him about that, and he can dress himself for Sabbath-school. He always goes to the Apostles' Memorial, you know; he is in Miss Ague's class. Perhaps if he comes down you'll just see his tie is straight, don't you know; but he does very well. I have tried to make him self-reliant and independent. Doctor Bryson believes children should be taught to do for themselves and others; it makes them unselfish, he says. I have a *genuine* horror of a selfish child."

"And a selfish mother," assented Mrs. Eliot.

"Yes, indeed. That's worse still. Well," added Mrs. Ledgcott, with the reflecting air of one who tries to remember all her errand, "I think that's all. I wanted so much to take him along—the dear boy nearly cried his heart out because he couldn't go with me; he is so devoted. But, unfortunately, I am only a guest, you know, and gentlemen are *so* impatient of children. Why do you never come over to see me, Mrs. Eliot?"

"I have few spare hours, Mrs. Ledgcott."

"You teach, do you not?"

"All the time—"

Doctor Bryson

"I have thought so often lately I ought to take up my own music. But I, too, have so little time. Well, good-by Ruth; good-by!"

"Good-by," said Mrs. Eliot. "I hope you'll have a pleasant time—"

"Oh, I hope so. How d' you do, Miss June? I think we shall. Good-by!"

June entering the room passed the baby lady with a lowering eye.

"What's she up to now?" she asked, sitting down on the bed.

"She is going away over Sunday and asked if Johnnie might spend the day with Ruth."

"Humph! Just as if he wouldn't anyway."

"She wants me to keep an eye on Johnnie while she is gone, I suppose."

"She's a good one. She takes care he never interferes with her fun."

The Annex dinner table was gay that Friday night, because Mrs. Ledgcott's announcement had been made and Bowles rose to the occasion and was witty. Next morning she set off for Waukesha, where her party was to coach to Madison. It was autumn and Wisconsin wore brown and red and gold under her blue skies, and her lakes slept. But autumn in Wisconsin and Chicago may be very different. Mrs. Ledgcott was whirled on the cars into sunshine, but the clouds behind thickened into mist and rain.

Sunday morning it was still raining in Chicago. Wisconsin was bright, the coaching party gay on gravelled roads and russet hills; Chicago, raining miserably. Bryson had a medical society banquet for Satur-

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day night at the Athletic Club and did not come home till Sunday afternoon. At the boarding house everybody read all day. There was really nothing for it but the Sunday papers and books. About four o'clock Bryson left John Allison before the fire and started for Mrs. Eliot's room with a book. Ruth and Johnnie Ledgcott were on the floor playing authors. June was pouring a tale of a rebellious boarder into Mrs. Eliot's sympathetic ear.

"A patient gave it to me yesterday; everybody's reading it," said Bryson, throwing himself into an offered chair as Mrs. Eliot looked at his book. "I don't really know what it is, but everybody's reading it. There's a horse trade in it that's alone worth the price of admission. You read and tell me about it, will you?" he asked of Mrs. Eliot. "That will save me wrestling with it. I've got to be able to answer questions on it, for the man that gave it to me is as sharp as tacks—a big wholesale grocer. Next time I meet him at the club he'll cross-examine me, sure. Why—" he exclaimed, turning suddenly towards Johnnie.

"What's the matter?" asked June. Bryson sat looking steadfastly at Johnnie Ledgcott. "What makes you breathe that way, Johnnie?" he demanded, fixing his keen eyes on the boy.

Johnnie, struggling with a breath, tried to laugh apologetically. "I have a cold, doctor. Mamma said it would be all right in a day or two."

"Come here," commanded the doctor, brusquely. He stood Johnnie before him and watched his breathing. The little fellow smiled a frightened smile back

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at Ruth, for Johnnie was alive to moods and felt the earnestness in the doctor's voice and eye.

It wasn't often Doctor Bryson looked like that. When he did, older folks than Johnnie kept silence. He brushed aside Johnnie's fine Sabbath-school tie and pressed his ear to the lad's throat and chest; turned him around; listened between his shoulder blades; took him to the window, and taking a spatula from his vest pocket looked a long time into his throat; not a word all the time from him, and certainly no word from anyone else. He brought Johnnie back with his hand on his shoulder.

"Where is his mother?"

It was such a queer question.

"Where is his mother?" more sharply.

"Why, you know; she's gone on the coaching party up to Waukesha," explained June. "She won't be back till to-morrow."

Bryson looked at the frail, handsome boy as he stood almost clinging to the only friend he had in the world—the long-legged, fierce-eyed Bryson.

"To-morrow!" he echoed, savagely. The women heard a suppressed exclamation from the doctor, still looking at the child. They couldn't for their lives see anything extraordinary in Johnnie's condition. His breath came quick, his cheeks were pinkish bright and his eyes flashed like sea water; that was all.

"June," said Bryson, his words cutting like knives, "put Johnnie to bed—quick. Is there a fire in their rooms? Have one built in the grate right away—a big one. Get hot water bottles and plenty of blankets ready. My room is hot—it's a little cool here. I'll take

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him up there. Come, Johnnie, till they get the fire going good and strong. Lively, June; don't lose a minute."

"Why, doctor! What's the matter?" demanded June in amazement. Mrs. Eliot only looking the question listened anxiously at his elbow.

"Croup. Johnnie, did you breathe hard Friday night?"

"Pretty hard. Mamma gave me some cough syrup. She thought it would go away."

"Were you outdoors yesterday? Did you get wet?"

"I was outdoors, but I didn't get wet, doctor."

"Look here, Johnnie. Go straight up to my room, will you? Hold on, don't run. June, where's that telephone—in the lower hall? Has Mrs. Ledgcott a physician?" he asked, descending the stairs, followed by June and Mrs. Eliot.

"She's got him with her."

"What?"

"She has Doctor Kurd. He took her on that coaching trip."

"Everybody gone. Hurry the fire, June." June started for the back of the basement. Bryson rang sharp at the telephone, called Jim up at the College and began giving orders; called up Jevons on the North Side—the head of the throat department at the College; called up his head nurse on the West Side, and could get no connection and grew angry. The head nurse could not be found; she was out. Bryson hung up the receiver impatiently.

"Couldn't I be nurse, doctor?" said a voice at his

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elbow. Mrs. Eliot was standing near him in the gloom.

"You?"

"I'll do just what you tell me."

"You would have to be up all night."

"I don't mind that—"

"Yes, but I mean every minute—you can't close your eyes."

"I won't."

He hesitated. "Well, let's go upstairs. He must have some medicine right away. I'll try Miss Gridley later. She's out with her beau, I suppose, like all the rest of them."

"Is he so very sick, doctor?" she asked, taking a rapid pace with him up the stairs and through the halls.

"I am afraid it is malignant. I saw him through one attack when they first came here three years ago. Johnnie was getting away from them and it was just an accident I got him through."

"Tell me how."

"They were giving him ipecac among other things. A few people have an idiosyncrasy for ipecac. Johnnie has; I discovered it through having such an idiosyncrasy myself, that is all. Instead of relaxing his larynx, ipecac actually contracts it. It is uncertain. He is a sick boy. He will keep us all guessing before morning, I'm afraid. I'm glad his mother will be back by that time."

CHAPTER IX

FOR half an hour there was hurrying up and down the Annex stairs. The grate in Mrs. Ledgcott's apartments was in her sitting-room. In twenty minutes June had a hot fire blazing in it, but it did not temper the bedroom air to suit Bryson. He wanted a temperature of eighty or close to it, and after one minute's deliberation all hands, which included June, John Allison, Mrs. Eliot and the doctor, went at the bed, took it down and set it up where he wanted it in the sitting-room. The door leading to the hall was straightway locked, and entrance had through the hall door of the bedroom. June was posted before the grate to warm blankets. Mrs. Eliot, at her side, undressed Johnnie, and, in heavy flannels, he was bundled between hot blankets into bed. At four o'clock Jim arrived from the College with a huge package of apparatus and medicines. It was not a failing of Bryson's to lose time in a fight or to go into it with ordinary measures. He brought in his best regiments at the beginning. In a critical case he was a whirlwind, and in the sick-room a despot. Before Jevons had arrived and the doctors had begun their consultation, two great vaporizers were blazing, and Johnnie, who had recovered his spirits and was inclined to look on the excitement as a great lark, peered happy as a boy prince out of the pillows. The two doctors looked, felt, auscultated, looked again,

Doctor Bryson

and talked together at Johnnie's side, then in the halls, then in Bryson's room. After they had finished their confab Bryson went upstairs. Jevons lighted a cigar with John Allison. The latter was too medically bred to ask questions, and Jevons talked little. They smoked in silence, and at six o'clock, after another half an hour in the sick-room, he left. John, downstairs, helped him on with his coat and asked him if he would be back that night.

"Bryson is doing everything that can be done. The child's larynx is small—the inflammation is way ahead of us; it is membranous. Good night."

Upstairs the gas jet was shaded, the medicines disposed upon the tables, the nurse's record opened. Johnnie lay asleep, breathing heavily. Mrs. Eliot sat in a rocking-chair at his side. A thermometer hung from the fixture over the table and another was tied, at the child's head, to the brass spindle of the bed. These were Jim's charge. "Keep them at seventy-eight degrees," the doctor had ordered, and Jim knew if they fell below seventy-six his master would supply all needed warmth in his reproof. He stole at intervals noiselessly in and out from the hall, where old Patrick had established relays of wood and coal. The vaporizers poured the incenselike odor of compound tincture of benzoin into the warm air; Mrs. Eliot rocked; Jim tiptoed in the shaded light, and outside the rain drove against the windows, the street lamps burned in a foggy drip of haze, cabs rumbled rhythmically over the cross-town car tracks, and evening wore into night.

June came in with Doctor Bryson to see about the watching.

Doctor Bryson

"Let Mrs. Eliot call me at twelve and I'll sit up till morning," she proposed. But June had a trick of dozing.

"You come up about ten and stay till one o'clock," suggested Bryson, with her weakness in mind. "That will give you a little sleep," he said to Mrs. Eliot, "and you can go to bed then, Miss June, and sleep till morning. You have plenty of work in the kitchen after five o'clock."

"What will you do?"

"Nap here on the couch."

"Aren't you going to bed?"

"Not to-night."

As they spoke Johnnie twisted restlessly and opened his eyes, heavy with fever. His face as he raised on his elbow showed about the mouth the uneasy greenish pallor of nausea. His breathing had scarcely changed since afternoon; but the night was ahead, the night of midnight and the night of morning. He took his medicine, threw himself into the pillows and went to sleep. At one o'clock Bryson, a sleeper trained to wake at will on the hour, rose from the couch, stretched himself before the grate, bent over Johnnie a minute, whispered to June that she might go to bed, peered at the thermometers, shivered a little, slipped on his coat, sat down and folded his arms before the fire. It was a deep, steady anthracite fire that burned red and gold from below, and turned at the crest into licking little bluish-greenish flame-tongues—a glowing, useful, faithful fire—like Jim. Above its hardly perceptible little explosions there was no sound except the child's labored breathing, which fell steadily above the whir

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of the rain on the doctor's ear. Once he got up, went to the bed and bent low over Johnnie. He watched the labored expansion of the chest, the heavy struggle of the lungs to pull in and to push out the air the blood hungered for. He took from the table a candle, and, holding it close, noted the color about the lips and nostrils, and was mentally deciding the child was getting enough air to oxidate his system, when he felt a presence at his side and his heart jumped. Mrs. Eliot leaned forward beside him, and he turned, candle in hand.

"How is he, doctor?" she breathed. Her very presence made his heart beat in his throat.

"About the same," he answered, as they stepped back and he replaced the candle on the table.

"Why did you get up?" he asked, drawing a stool beside the chair in front of the grate, and motioning her to the chair as he sat down on the stool.

Her hair was coiled. If there was about it a trace of looseness it was only the little that sharpens the wish for more. She was dressed as for the day, and, sinking into the chair, she turned toward him with her hands clasped over the arm.

"Because I want to be of what help I can."

"I can manage alone."

"But you said—" A struggling breath from the bed arrested her. Bryson rose like a mild mannered jumping-jack and hastened to the bed.

"He is tightening," said the doctor, after a second breath and a third. "We must prepare."

Straining for breath, Johnnie, with suddenly open-

Doctor Bryson

ing eyes, rose straight up in bed. He looked all about the room.

"Mamma!" he cried, staring in suffocation and fright.

"Yes, Johnnie; yes, dear," said the voices on either side of the bed. "It's I, Johnnie. Doctor Bryson and Mrs. Eliot. You remember us, don't you?"

"Mamma!" he cried, panting, gasping.

"Call Jim, please, Mrs. Eliot," said the doctor, imperatively.

"Mamma!"

"Ask him to give you the hot water cloths."

"Mamma!"

"Wring them out hot—hot."

"I'm—choking!"

"No, Johnnie. Don't scald your hands. Be quick. Don't be frightened, Johnnie. I'll take care of you."

The little fellow broke into a hoarse, quavering cry. Mrs. Eliot had run to Jim, asleep in the window seat of the bedroom on a pile of Mrs. Ledgcott's lovely sofa pillows. She had only to call his name and give the message when he was on his feet. Close at hand he had a pan of water hot on a gas stove. He snatched a small towel from a stand, and, holding each end, swung it through the pan, wrung it and passed it hot to Mrs. Eliot, who hurried to the doctor.

"Now, Johnnie," said Doctor Bryson, "here's something that will help you. Never mind the hot."

"I want mamma. Mamma!! Oh, oh!"

"It won't burn you," urged the doctor, wrapping the cloth like a snake around his neck. "It will help you to breathe better, Johnnie. Try to keep still; do

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try. It is harder for you to breathe when you struggle so. Quick, Mrs. Eliot; another towel—hotter.”

Again and again it seemed to Mrs. Eliot as they worked that each breath of the frantic boy would be his last. Bryson—silent, active and ignoring the desperate conditions—wrung the steaming cloths about Johnnie’s neck unceasingly. When it seemed as if suffocation must become absolute, as if the very end had come, the vocal chords somewhat relaxed, and, bundled tight in woolen wrappings, Johnnie, cruelly exhausted, was let down, breathing easier. He lay, as the doctor commanded, quiet as a mouse, taking his medicine meekly, thanking Mrs. Eliot when she gave him a drink, just as he used to when he played little soldier with Ruth: then looked at each of them pathetically with his big bright eyes as they sat near. Once, when Ruth’s mother wiped the sweat from his forehead and his face contracted in the nausea of the deadly tartar emetic, he asked if she would not please ask his mamma to hurry back early in the morning—not knowing day was already breaking.

They watched beside him through the last of the early hours, breakfasted in turn, and Bryson, perfectly fresh, laid the plans for the day precisely, warning everybody that no relaxation of care was possible. Only one thing occurred to disarrange them. Miss Gridley, the nurse, came at eight o’clock; but no morning train brought Mrs. Ledgcott. The strain and the disappointment irritated everybody. When noon came without Mrs. Ledgcott June broke out in rebellion. She and Mrs. Eliot came up together from luncheon,

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and June expressed, without reserve, her opinion of the absentee.

"If she wasn't such a scheming, selfish piece all the time—all the time, mind you," exclaimed June, angrily, "I wouldn't say anything about her staying away like this. She's up there trying to catch that Kurd—that's what she's doing. I know it just as well as if I was there myself. She schemed two years to catch Doctor Bryson. She always gets down to breakfast early so she can eat with the men—says she can't sleep. When they go down town she goes upstairs to bed and sleeps the whole morning; then she thinks I ain't onto her."

Jevons was in the sick-room when they reached it. He and Bryson were talking at the fireplace. The nurse sat near the window. Johnnie wheezing painfully lay pale among the pillows. He looked appealingly at Mrs. Eliot and tried to call.

"Yes, dear," she said, hurrying over. "What is it?"

"I am going to die," he whispered.

"Oh, Johnnie, Johnnie, no you're not. No, no, you are going to get better. Doctor Bryson's going to have you well in just a day or two." He looked at her earnestly. "Can I say good-by to Ruth?"

"You may say just what you like to Ruth, dear, only you are not going to die. It would make her feel too bad, Johnnie, if you talked of that."

He looked far away. "Can she just come see me then? And I—won't say a word about—that." Each word cost a fearful effort.

"Yes, dear, she shall come—now the nurse wants

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to give you some medicine—let me lift your head—there.”

When she had laid him back she followed the doctor out through the bedroom down the hall. They were talking at the head of the stairs. Jevons took his cigar from his mouth as he raised his hat, said good-by, and walked downstairs.

“Could Ruth come up and see Johnnie, doctor?” asked Mrs. Eliot, as she walked with Bryson slowly back.

“No.”

“Poor little fellow. He asked if she might,” she faltered. “It isn’t diphtheria, is it?”

“No,” he said, abstractedly; “but it is malignant.”

“Oh, and I foolishly promised she could come. What can I say?”

“Say anything. Lie.”

“I might say she may come up to-morrow if he’s better—he’ll be over the worst of it to-morrow, won’t he?”

They were at the bedroom door before he answered.

“Yes. He’ll be over the worst of it.”

“Oh, I hope so.”

June coming out met them. She took both their arms and pushed them back with her.

“What’s the matter?” asked Bryson.

“I can’t stand it.”

“What?”

“His breathing.”

“Go downstairs then.”

Tears started in her eyes. “Don’t be cross, doctor,

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"I can't help it." They moved down the hall. "He's awful sick, ain't he, doctor?"

"Yes."

"Is he going to get well?"

"I can't tell."

"What do you think?"

"The inflammation is severe. It couldn't be worse. His heart is acting badly. I am trying to force it. You can tell, June, almost as well as I can, whether it will hold up for twenty-four hours. That's all on earth there is to it. He's getting enough oxygen yet, but it costs the heart a frightful price. Cheer up, old girl; I'm doing all in God's world I can—"

"I can't help it," she sobbed, hiding her face in her handkerchief as she went downstairs.

"I'm glad you're not that way, Mrs. Eliot," said Bryson. They walked up the hall again together. "It's been half the battle to see you around so cheerful—"

"Aren't you going down town to-day?"

"And so helpful. No. I arranged for my lectures. There won't be any patients looking for me in this blizzard."

The rain had changed at daybreak into snow. A storm was driving from the northeast. "Everything is against me," he said, looking moodily out. "This infernal weather—I got hold of the poor boy twenty-four hours too late—a flabby heart."

"No matter—you will pull him through. I feel sure of it."

"The credit will be half yours if I do. Jevons said yesterday he would be dead this morning."

Doctor Bryson

"Doctor!"

"That is what he said—yesterday."

"Oh, what did he say this morning?"

"'You've certainly stuck him up, doctor. You've fooled me,' he said," Bryson quoted quietly. "'But I doubt if you can hold him to it.'"

"What did you answer?"

"I told him I could fool him again, perhaps. Possibly." He looked abstractedly toward the bedroom door. "Possibly."

She realized when she went back into the sick-room how slender Johnnie's chances were, and hoped that the afternoon trains would bring his mother. All the long afternoon the white storm fell, and at last, night; but Mrs. Ledgcott did not come. Unknown to everyone at the house, the telephone and telegraph wires were ringing with messages from Bryson urging her to return. They could not find her, and the storm blew harder, and Bryson—impassive, untiring—directed and watched and sat and napped in the sick-room. For hours he kept Johnnie breathing by sheer suggestion, for when the doctor left his side the struggling boy ceased his herculean effort and lapsed into asphyxiation. With the deepening of the night Bryson held the candle oftener to his face, drawn now like the face of an old man. Thirty-six hours had aged it twice as many years, and it was bluish about the lips and nostrils with venous blood.

After a long vigil at the bedside and at the end of ten minutes' sleep for him on the couch, Miss Gridley, reluctant, touched Bryson's shoulder. She did not speak. Between those who know so few words are

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necessary. He listened an instant instinctively for the hoarse rasping breath, clock of the sick-room, and he rose and went to the bed. The sick boy was no longer breathing. He was panting horribly. Bryson took up his pulse—looked mechanically at his watch. It was hard on midnight. While he looked the bells of the Apostles' Memorial Church began chiming the last quarter of the day. At the same moment the portières were pushed aside. June and Mrs. Eliot, sleepless, restless and miserable, stole together into the room.

"We will try an intubation, Miss Gridley, at once. Get the set ready," directed Bryson, taking off his coat.

"What's he going to do?" whispered June as Bryson stepped to the bedroom to wash his hands.

"He's going to slip a gold tube into the larynx to keep it open. It's a fearfully hard thing to do. He's choking to death."

As if he heard—though he could not—Johnnie Ledgcott sat up, struggling. His face set in an agony of fear, and looking appealingly from one to another about him, he strove to cry out; but crying out was past.

"Johnnie," said the doctor, hurrying back, "I'm going to help you breathe better—I want to slip this tube into your throat; try to keep quiet. It may hurt a little, but you must have air—" The child controlled himself for a minute bravely. The surgeon and the nurse began almost at once the delicate and difficult operation. With their efforts, weakness, fright, suffocation mastered the child. He resisted convulsively, and became unmanageable. The struggle between the

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three grew sickening. Bryson coaxed and pleaded and attempted again and again to make the insertion. June and Mrs. Eliot fled to the bedroom and waited tremblingly for the outcome. After a time the strangulation bore less upon their ears—the terrifying sounds ceased. The nurse came out to wet a towel. They seized her arms.

"It's all right," she whispered, excitedly. "It is in. The doctor had an awful time. He's breathing." She had hardly spoken when Bryson stalked to her side at the washstand, turned up the gas and began furiously washing his hands. His hair was tumbled, his shirt flecked with blood, his forehead pale and dripping sweat. Heedless of those about him, an oath burst from his lips.

"A woman that will neglect a child like that," he exclaimed, in rage, "ought to be quartered and hung to the four winds. Gridley, watch his pulse now like a cat. Give him all the brandy you can."

"Doctor," trembled Mrs. Eliot, shocked and frightened as the nurse hurried back to the bed, "you succeeded?" He turned coolly, nodded, wiped his hands and mopped his face with the dry towel. She looked a hundred questions.

"It's up to the heart now," was all he said.

When they entered the sick-room the dreadful breathing was no longer heard. It was such a relief to June and her companion that they cheered up. With all four sitting thus about the room and Jim at intervals pawkily feeding the fire, the night wore into the dead and into the early morning. Miss Gridley, speaking to the doctor, went down with June to get a cup of coffee.

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Mrs. Eliot sat at the bedside. Doctor Bryson, throwing off the blanket he had been napping under, stood with folded arms and disordered hair at the foot of the bed looking at the pinched, sunken face under the shaded lamp. Mrs. Eliot tried, too, to read something from the faint, short respiration, for even she perceived it had changed. Once Johnnie rested, she thought. Between breaths he dropped one, seeming easier and quieter. The doctor stepped silently to the table, and, taking up a delicate instrument, went to the boy, bared his arm, raised its flesh between the fingers of the left hand, pricked the needle into the white skin and pressed brandy again into the delicate tissue. He withdrew the syringe and knelt on one knee beside the bed, holding the pulse in his hand. He bent his head and put his ear for an answer to the heart. It was still in the room, for the snow beat softly on the window panes and muffled the clank of the cab-wheels over the car-tracks. Rising, the doctor walked to the foot of the bed and stood again, his head down, watching. Mrs. Eliot tiptoed to his side.

"The dear little fellow is easier, isn't he?"

He looked kindly at her. "Did you ever see anybody die?" he asked, in his blunt way.

"No, doctor."

"Never do if you can help it. Keep away from deathbeds as long as you can. A child's death isn't pleasant; a woman's is worse; a man's, horrible."

She wondered why he spoke in that way, and repeated her question. "But Johnnie is easier, isn't he, doctor?"

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He smiled bitterly sad. "Yes: easier. Don't you know? He is dying."

She caught at the bed. "No! No! Not dying?"

"Dying; deserted in a boarding house," he said, hoarsely deliberate. "No home; no father; no mother; no prayer. Just like a poor little friendless puppy; dying."

She burst into tears.

"I couldn't save him. I never had a show for a single hour to save him. I've played my last card—and lost. Listen; do you notice that? He drops a breath every little while; he's dying. Don't stay here," he urged, as she sobbed harder; "don't see him die. That is for me to do; it is my reward. Go. Go, Mrs. Eliot." He took her arm, but she would not go away. She tottered forward; he supported her to Johnnie's side. She fell on her knees, threw her arms across the coverlet and buried her face, sobbing. June, running in, saw all, fell beside Mrs. Eliot, and, throwing an arm around the child, shrieked as if to brave the messenger that hovered over him. But Johnnie was easier; and the nurse wiped the thin froth from his white lips; he was dead.

In the gloom of the late morning there came a sharp ring at the Annex basement. June, from the dining-room, opened the door; Mrs. Ledgcott stood there.

"Oh, June, how are you all? Dear, I'm glad to get back," she cried, happily, shaking the snow from her wraps and stamping her little feet. "Isn't this a *horrible* storm? It was so dreadful at Milwaukee yesterday, Doctor Kurd said I just *shouldn't* start. He said it

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would be *dangerous* to expose myself. Well, how are you all? How's Johnnie?"

"Mrs. Eliot wants to see you about Johnnie."

"What? Now, June! has he been misbehaving?"

"No. He's dead."

It had not been so planned. The telling had been assigned to Mrs. Eliot, but June blurted everything out before they could stop her. Mrs. Ledgcott sunk shivering to the basement floor. She choked hysterically as she fell and screamed. June, with a cloudy eye, looked coldly on. Then, relenting, she tried to pick her up. But Mrs. Ledgcott, at that, screamed appallingly and wriggled out of June's arms.

"All right," muttered June, fiercely. "Lie there. Kick and fling till you're tired of it."

The women rushed in from the breakfast table. Mrs. Goddard and Mrs. Eliot got Mrs. Ledgcott upstairs. She so frightened everybody with her grief that they sent hurriedly down to Bryson, quietly breakfasting.

"Doctor, what shall we do?" asked Mrs. Goddard, fearfully.

Bryson looked up, a bit haggard, from his coffee. "What's *she* doing?"

"Mercy, can't you hear her? Screaming madly—and choking. What shall we do?"

"Throw a bucket of ice-water on her."

"Oh, doctor. Just as she is?" cried Mrs. Goddard, horror stricken.

"Just exactly as she is. If that doesn't feaze her put her into a bathtub and rub ice up and down her spine. What she needs is something worse than she's got. Come, John," said he to Allison, getting up from the table. "Going down town?"

CHAPTER X

A SECOND sensation, and even more bewildering, followed Johnnie Ledgcott's funeral at Miss Borderly's. Miss Mary, on the very day following, announced the close of the house of Borderly. There was consternation among a hundred people. There was wrath, grief, protest; but to Miss Mary's mind it was a simple business proposition. The landlord had announced a rise in the rent; the location was too far down town. People were going further out. The plumbing was out of date; the row of houses was not worth the rent; the big copartnership must be dissolved. A few professed to be glad, but many for years had known no home but Miss Borderly's. Even a boarding house counterfeits in some respects the sacredness of a home, and the breaking up of any home, real or professed, is a dire event. Miss Mary, however, was as impervious to sentiment as a mackintosh to moisture. She frankly confessed she was not doing business for her health.

June naturally caught most of the reproaches. At the Bryson-Goddard table there was the worst kind of rebellion—the rebellion of the very prosperous—and it took such insidious shape that June herself went over to the enemy and denounced Miss Mary. In truth, June was easily seduced into the opposition ranks, for her set in the Annex was as much to her as the house

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was to them. June being a creature of sentiment ill-brooked the breaking up, and asked herself what was to become of her after the deluge. Stay in a five-room flat and wait on sister Mary and sister Anna? No people, no profanity, no poker? No cosey evenings in the den, with a prosperous fire and the doctor telling a story and John pulling quietly at a brier; or a twilight hour with Mrs. Eliot and Ruth; or the very latest South Side stirring social event in subdued, dramatic tones from Mrs. Goddard?

The minute the men saw her unsettled they knew the business was done. The next thing was merely the proper scheme—and what Chicago man, with an emergency to be met, is without an adequate scheme? It was devised in the den. First Bryson and John Allison, over a grate fire and a pipe. Then June, brought in and discreetly sounded and cautiously urged; Mrs. Goddard and Miss Montague, in marvelous soft-flowing gowns, added to the firelight; two or three other favored ones let in. Mrs. Eliot whispered to by June privately; objections on various hands raised; objections met. Difficulties encountered, difficulties overcome. Secrecy asked and secrecy pledged, and Miss June, one fine morning, in jacket and bonnet alone in the cable cars, on free transportation furnished by John Allison, headed south, house hunting.

Then the Annex set grew suddenly calm—looked patronizing while others looked perplexed. A lease was brought by Miss June into the den; signed by her and guaranteed jointly and severally by John C. Allison and Henry Elwood Bryson. Furniture was selected by various parties in interest, to be delivered on order

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at a modern fourteen-room residence on one of the lower avenues; Julie MacGeveny, the crack Borderly cook, engaged; Nannie, the demurest of the maids, secured. What more would you have but the announcement that stirred envy from end to end of the dining-room, that Miss June had taken a house and would open it with a strictly limited and select company of ten boarders, six from the Annex. And there was envious comment when the news went round the dining-room with the postscript that her rooms were all taken. Miss Mary was cold over June's venture, but that chilled nobody's ardor. John Allison and Bryson gave her carte blanche, and June had a new home and a den ready for them on New Year's day.

A farewell dinner given in the Annex on Christmas surpassed every banquet ever held under the roof; and one single procession of vans removed everybody concerned, as well as the big music box of Bowles, down to the new quarters. The dining-room was formally christened on New Year's with light heart and holiday wine, and those who sat together were a goodly company, young and happy and wise and flushed with prosperity and the good of life. Miss June glowed at the head of the table and served many, many good things that New Year's night; and Bryson, tall and dignified, presided at the foot and tried to fill John Allison's glass oftener than anybody else's, and tried without success to fill Mrs. Eliot's at least once.

The routine at Miss June's settled into much the same lines that prevailed at Miss Borderly's. She was flooded with applications for board, but none were passed on except in open meeting, as Bowles called the

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dinner table, and if objections were raised the applicants were turned down. The great object was not to keep the house full, said Bryson, but to keep it empty. In the evening if they went out they went in sets. If they stayed at home they had music, with John Allison singing or Mrs. Eliot at the piano, Bowles and Miss Montague two-stepping around the new furniture. They played cards, especially when Goddard was at home, for he was a Colorado man and a "stayer," and in a jack-pot his long red scar would turn muddy white for fear of revealing something in his face. Mrs. Eliot, in spite of urging, remained an outsider at cards. She never played save under coercion, and one night confessed very frankly that she thought cards stupid, no necessary part of a woman's education, and declined to blunder longer to please anybody. And Miss Montague, who played only because the others played, applauded her. If Mrs. Goddard did not applaud, being, as her husband classed her, a "dead game sport," she remembered Mrs. Eliot's unerring judgment on hats and gowns and effects feminine of every description—a weak point in her own philosophy—and smiled at the heretic. Even the men discovered her gift in these things and referred new clothes and new hats to Mrs. Eliot's judgment. So without being precisely of them she was, as she had been in the Annex, in a way with them, and welcome. She worked hard; at least she came home at night very tired sometimes and glad to go to her rooms, which were on the second floor in the rear. When there was a down-town party she would sometimes go with the crowd, for June rather courted taking care of Ruth—that is, sitting in the den reading

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the doctor's magazines with the hall doors open so that she could hear if Ruth called out.

The weather was never too bad for Mrs. Eliot to go to her studio, which was in the Fine Arts Building on Michigan Avenue, and at Miss June's she would have been considered still more conscientious at her teaching had it been known that sometimes for hours together she sat there patiently waiting for pupils to avail themselves of her services. She was first down town in the morning, and very often Bryson and John, who went together, rode down with her, she getting off at Van Buren Street. John always saw that she had passes on the street cars. "They cost me nothing," he would say when she demurred at accepting them. "You might as well have them as the thousand-odd other people that do." And she would reluctantly accept them at times and say she felt quite sure, somehow, she ought not to. But everybody at Miss June's rode on John's tickets, and it seemed awkward to refuse the courtesy.

Sometimes other things along the same line seemed to cause embarrassment to Mrs. Eliot. Toward spring she complained about headaches, and Bryson, who, without appearing to observe anything, observed everything, suggested they might come from her eyes. "If you will come in some morning when you are down town I will look at them; you may need glasses." Mrs. Eliot thanked him.

"Yes," said he one morning some weeks later, when he had again quietly suggested examining her eyes to correct the trouble, and she had again thanked him, "you thank me, but you don't come; and you are strain-

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ing your eyes, I suspect, unnecessarily." They were riding down in the street car and he was talking as he often talked about her health and her work.

"Do you find it profitable—teaching?" he asked once. She hesitated a moment.

"Fairly. Not so profitable as I try to make myself think, I'm afraid."

"Well, I don't know how you teach, but I know I never in my life heard anybody get the music out of a piano that you do. It has the strangest effect on me when you play—"

"You are so fond of music you ought to be a musician."

"I shall have to take lessons of you some time."

"Very well; you shall have them free."

"Don't be rash, for I may take you up unexpectedly. How are the headaches?"

"Not much better, I'm afraid."

"Yet you read the newspaper on the street car."

"Shouldn't I?"

"You never see me do it, do you? My eyes are perfect, but I need perfect eyes. It is habits such as reading on the cars that makes business for us. When are you coming up to have your eyes examined?"

There was no getting away from his calm persistence. One day when her headache was unendurable he gave her a bottle of atropine and an eye-dropper, with the necessary instructions, and told her he thought he could cure her headache. On the third day after using it he bade her come down to the office. "Unless," he added, "it is too cold."

It was, in fact, a bitterly cold day. But Mrs. Eliot

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was nervous under the queer condition of her sight, due to the atropine, and preferred to take the examination at once.

"At what time shall I come, doctor?"

"Any time you like. You know I have a clinic from ten to eleven. When you come bring this." He took from his pocket a small card and across it wrote a word—"Immediate."

Somewhat dazed with her dilated pupils, Mrs. Eliot presented the tiny credential to Miss Martin that afternoon, and it wreathed the able secretary's face in smiles. Mrs. Eliot had hardly time to reflect on its magic when Jim ushered her into Doctor Bryson's office, where he was just disposing of a patient.

"A most interesting case of hysterical amblyopia," he explained, as the patient, a dark-eyed, florid girl of twelve years, passed out.

"Pray what is that?"

"Just wait a moment and I'll show you," said he, ringing for Jim. "Ask that girl to step back here a minute. I'll show you just what it is," he resumed to Mrs. Eliot. "After you see you will know as much about it as I do. Only observe; in my demonstration I shall put this glass on her eyes to read with—this arrangement," he explained, holding up a complicated lens arrangement on a trial frame. "I shall have two cylinders, one over the other, one plus fifty and one minus fifty. One neutralizes the other, and the effect is the same as looking through a simple pane of glass. In other words, these glasses that I shall place on her eyes to read the letters on that chart will have no physical effect whatever on her sight. Yet with them

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she can read all the type over there, and without them she cannot read letters two inches high."

While Mrs. Eliot strove to comprehend, Doctor Bryson rigged a pair of powerful lenses in a frame to enable her to see things herself. Jim came back presently with the large brunette girl, who was richly dressed and accompanied by her older brother.

"Sara," said the doctor, "this is Mrs. Eliot, who has a little girl like you. I want to show her how well you read with your glasses. First read without them. Now."

Sara read at the type chart, but badly. At the third line she quite lost the big letters. Bryson put the plain glasses on her, and she read again, this time without difficulty, to the small type on the chart. "Twenty-twentieths," announced the doctor, amiably. "Thank you, Sara. Come again to-morrow. You couldn't believe it unless you saw it, could you?" he asked, turning to Mrs. Eliot as the door closed. "Somewhere between the optic nerve and the brain in that child's head there is a hitch in the connection of impression. There is not the slightest physical difference made in her sight by adding these glasses. Yet when I tell her she can see with them, she sees, as you have witnessed. Queer, isn't it?"

"How did you treat her to accomplish this?"

"By something just as inexplicably strange—suggestion."

"Suggestion?"

"Hypnotism is a bigger word for it. I bid her see and she sees; that's what it amounts to."

"Are you a hypnotist, doctor?"

Doctor Bryson

He shook his head impatiently. "I'm not. I disavow the name. Yet to an extent all medical men are hypnotists. I show you this case because it is absolute—a perfect type of something we know nothing whatever about."

"What nationality is she?"

"Jewish. The Jews are neurotic, subject, by the way, to glaucoma; a most interesting people. Now let's go through the primer lesson together, if you please." He adjusted the trial-frame bows deftly over her ears. "Read with your left eye."

Mrs. Eliot read; so well that they both laughed. "No headache there," commented Bryson, grimly. "Now try the right eye. From the looks of it I think it will give us the headache," he said, shifting the blind. The right eye did tell the story. "It is astigmatism, and we will measure it. Perhaps you'd better take off your hat." She removed her hat; he took it to lay it on the table.

"Is this one of those things Miss June is always talking about that you make yourself?" he asked, holding it up.

She smiled and nodded. "Yes. That is one of those things."

"Oh, I meant nothing but admiration for it, only I don't know the name. What is it?"

"It's a toque," she answered. "What is next, doctor?"

He put the hat down with much care. "The ophthalmometer; sit there, please. Now," he added, after no end of focusing and adjusting and the putting down of some figures, "I'll look at the retina and refract you

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with the retinoscope. That will take us to the dark-room for a moment."

Holding her gloves and jacket, she followed Doctor Bryson into the receiving-room, not without some slight satisfaction in her erect carriage, for every eye turned where Bryson went, and his patients were of themselves distinguished. He paused just at his office door.

"Pardon me," he suggested, "leave your wraps here in the office.

"Thank you," she murmured as he took them. She poised herself then with especial dignity to pass Miss Martin's desk or to encounter Doctor Kurd, whose pitiless bill still lingered in her memory. Sure enough, they did meet him. He advanced his stubby neck and shoulders briskly toward them with his hateful smile, and she bowed. Bryson saw the bow. He went into the dark-room in great humor.

"Artistically done," he laughed. She assumed some surprise. "Now, please don't freeze me," he pleaded. "I couldn't help seeing it, could I? I only say it was the best I ever saw; served him right, too. If you will sit here, please. So, as the Germans say."

He adjusted the gas bracket and shade behind her ear and took out the ophthalmoscope. Focusing the rays upon her eye, always singularly calm, Doctor Bryson slowly examined each retina in turn. It was rather tedious, a little trying, but she sat immovable even when, in his scrutiny, he drew so close that his eye was glued to her own.

"Three things that I have studied in my life," he said at last, putting away the ophthalmoscope, "have

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held me in awe: the circulation of the blood, the X-ray, the retina of the eye."

"Are they so wonderful?"

"Passing understanding. There is nothing more exquisitely beautiful than the retina. With care you should have good sight as long as you live. You have exceptional eyes—wonderful, really. It is splitting hairs now, but I want to refract you with the retinoscope to confirm my other tests." At the conclusion he seemed satisfied. They returned to the office. "I will bring your glasses down to-morrow night," he continued, finishing his memorandum while she put on her hat.

"Are you going home?"

"Yes, doctor."

"Can you wait two minutes? I'll go down with you—"

"Certainly."

"We will drive if you say so. I can have the horses here in five minutes."

"Oh, no, thank you. Let us take the car." His hand was on the button for Jim to order the team.

"It's queer," said he, stopping, "I never can get you behind my horses."

"Really, I am mortally afraid of horses, doctor."

"It's a fearfully cold day to ride in the cars. Do you know it was eight below zero at noon?"

"I was run away with once."

"I'll wrap you up in robes till you are warm as toast. You'll never run away with me, I promise you."

"I'm sure I shan't. I know my fear is absurd, but I can't overcome it."

Doctor Bryson

"You let Ruth ride with me." She showed no trace of confusion.

"True, but she is not afraid, and I should trust her anywhere with you. I will ride in the phaeton if it will very much please you."

He laughed to throw off the slight strain that both were suddenly conscious of. "Oh, no. I only want to give you comfort, and you prefer the cable, so we will take the cable." He avoided saying car because cable seemed a term of reproach and he wanted the shade of resentment the word gave him.

"Let's walk down Michigan Avenue a way, if you don't object," he suggested when they reached the street. "The air is good, if it is frosty." At Jackson Street he halted before a florist's. "Step in just a moment, will you? I want to get some flowers; then we'll take the car." A smiling German girl came forward; the doctor was a good customer. He bought some tulips for the table and some violets for Ruth.

"Now what can I get for you?" he asked, turning to Mrs. Eliot, while the blond head of the German girl was in the window.

"Oh, nothing for me, doctor. Thank you ever so much. You see—"

"You never will let me give a flower to you."

"I know its indefensible; but I grew up in the country, doctor," she said, brightening with interest at the recollection.

"So did I," he interrupted.

"And I—city flowers seem forced and not always natural to me. They lack the peculiar excellence of the genuine, as the advertisers say," she ran on playfully.

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The blond German ears in the window were quite open. The blond head came out of the green. "My lady, here is something fresh from the country—mignonette."

Mrs. Eliot could not resist the freshness and the fragrance. "Mignonette?" she exclaimed. "From the south?"

"Give me what you have there," said Bryson, in mild haste. "Wrap it separately."

"All of it?"

"Yes."

"Why, doctor!" exclaimed Mrs. Eliot.

"Yes, for your room; here, give me some, will you?" he asked of the German girl. He took a spray from the bunch she held out. As she stepped back to wrap the order, he inhaled the odor of the spray and handed it to Mrs. Eliot. "Here's a flower like you: country bred, city brought, like you."

"You keep it, doctor. Let me fasten it in your lapel. You are a country flower, too, don't you know, and city brought. It all applies to you."

"Don't call me a flower," he laughed, as she stood close pinning the mignonette on his coat.

"Then don't call me one," she retorted, in kind. "It is really very sweet, this mignonette. It contrasts perfectly with your tie."

"But you are a flower and I am none," he persisted, ignoring her postscript. She changed the subject with a sudden repressed exclamation.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I pricked my finger. I can hardly see anything, anyway. Your coat is such thick goods," she went on,

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hurriedly. "Come, shall we not go? It is getting so late."

"But I must pay—"

"Oh, no, doctor, it is not necessitous," interposed the blond girl, catching the last word as she came forward. "I shall charge it."

"No you won't," said Bryson, handing her a bill. "Give me the change, quick, please."

When they reached the car at Wabash Avenue there were no seats. It looked like standing all the way home, and Doctor Bryson's face took on a weary expression as he crowded forward. A messenger boy was sitting between two ladies in the front end of the car, and with him Doctor Bryson negotiated for a seat in which he placed Mrs. Eliot. "You are resourceful, doctor," she said, speaking low as he bent to hear, "but very extravagant, I'm afraid." She had seen something slip from his hand to that of the boy as the latter got up.

"You are moderately blessed with resources yourself," he added, in the same tone, "especially when it comes to dodging things." She smiled peculiarly—something of reproach, possibly gratitude, in her eyes. Whatever the light was as she looked up—her eyes for an instant in his—she put a little handkerchief to her lips, and, with the composed air of a woman protected, cared for, let fall her gloved hand, glanced down at her lap full of flowers, and looked upon the people about her. It made him exultant and happy; so happy that he failed to see a changed expression on her face. But when he looked down at her again with that comfortable sense of companionship, as one looks over all and

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lets his eyes rest again on what he best loves, he felt a shock. Her nostrils were drawn like leaves of a sensitive plant.

"You are faint," he exclaimed, bending low from the strap that steadied him.

"No," she protested, closing her lips firmly.

"The air is close—let us leave the car," he suggested.

She started as if to assent, then refused. "I shall be all right in a moment. Please do not notice me," she half whispered. But her face was pale and it disturbed him. He pulled a newspaper from his pocket and pretended to read. His field of vision was in itself remarkable, and looking at the paper he was like a man with atropine in his eyes who sees everything but that at which he looks. He saw the faces of those on either side of her. He observed narrowly the men standing about him. He shifted to look at the passengers across the aisle; but in none of the faces that he scrutinized could he see anything like an answer to his question. All were busy with their own concerns, and the strange look on her face startled and worried him. Distress, under the resolute mask she had set on her features, was evident, and when after many moments their corner was reached and she started to leave the car, she dropped her flowers twice before she reached the step.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Eliot?" he asked. She stumbled even in stepping upon the curb. He quickly took her arm. "Was it the air made you faint? Those cars are abominable, really; they are not fit to ride in," he declared, supporting her as they walked. In spite of her distraction she was conscious of his strength

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and confidence; he kept her close at his side. As they took the cross-street the wind cut them like ice.

"It wasn't the air," she shivered.

"Then it's a chill," he exclaimed, hugging her arm closer.

"No. It is not a chill—such as you mean," she managed to say. Her face was deadly white.

"You can't tell. Let us hurry; lean more on my arm. Do, now; I'll trot you home in a jiffy."

"Don't let us go home quite yet," she said, nervously. "This way—"

"Any way," he exclaimed, turning into Thirty-fifth Street. "Tell me, will you always keep a veil between us? Or is it my fault that you do not know I want your troubles to be my troubles. Let me know every one and help you bear them."

"No, you cannot. I bear them alone." She paused, and it was only after they had walked some distance that she added, "I saw my husband in the car."

He took it with perfect steadiness. "What of it? Surely, he is nothing to you?"

"Nothing! Oh, yes."

"What do you mean? Do you—"

"No, no, no."

"Has he any claim on you?"

"No, but a chain. I wear it," she looked fearlessly up to him, "wherever I go."

He had never seen her face so. Flushed now, and her cheeks and her eyes burning; her lips flying into words and shutting into lines he had never seen about her mouth before. He felt as if he were leaving the earth.

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"Tell me what you mean."

"I mean—you surely know why I am forced to refuse so much kindness that you offer me. I am bound to him. I never have had the courage to tell you in words that I appreciate all you try to do for me."

"Never mind that."

"That I do love all the things that you try to give me; all the kindnesses you mean for me; but that I have no right to them. I am bound. And I tell you now because I know that I must. I have never seen him since I told him, when Ruth was three months old, I would support myself and my child. I was justified."

"You need not explain. I believe you."

"But he is Ruth's father. Whatever he is, he is her father."

"Not if he has forfeited the right—"

"In every way a man can forfeit he has forfeited everything. Yet he is my husband."

"But you are divorced from him?"

"No, no."

"Why not?"

"The disgrace."

"Disgrace?"

"Now I have told you why sometimes I act so queerly. You are vexed that I do not accept your kindness. I have no right to it. What street is this—Thirty-ninth? Have we walked so far? We must go back. Come, let us hurry."

The wind stung their faces as they turned north. It was bitter, and he kept her sternly close while she, with shrinking face, bent silently to the wind. He tried to talk. She spoke in monosyllables and reso-

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lutely refused to say more. Arriving at the house, he opened the door with his pass key. "Good-by," she said, starting up the stairs.

The pain in her face maddened him. "I wish to heaven I had made you ride home in the phaeton," he muttered, "then it wouldn't have happened."

"It would have happened sometime."

"That's what you get for being proper," he ventured, raising his brows. She returned his expression in a slight degree, and, smiling, turned again to ascend. "Hold on, here's the mignonette," he exclaimed.

"No, no," she pleaded. "Take it to the den."

"Stop!" he persisted, as she caught up her dress. "This at least." He tore the spray from his lapel, and, stepping hurriedly to the banister, caught her hand, and, thrusting the blossoms into it, bent with his other hand her fingers tightly over them. She ran to her room.

"Those were mighty fine flowers you brought home to-night," said June at dinner to the doctor. "But every one of them was froze solid," she added, cloudily apprehensive. "Did you know, mister, that's terrible bad luck?"

CHAPTER XI

NEXT evening he brought the eyeglasses to her room. "How very dainty they are," she cried with enthusiasm. "What a pretty case."

"Let me try them on you," he said. She sat quietly while he adjusted them upon her nose.

"How do they look? Dreadful?" she asked doubtfully.

"What do you say, Ruth?" asked Bryson, drawing her to his side as he sat down and her mother awaited inspection.

"Mamma, I think they are beautiful," declared Ruth gravely, and her elders laughed. They always took the little chances to laugh perhaps because they were afraid big ones might never come. Mrs. Eliot picked up a book. "These are merely for reading music or print," said he. "You don't need them for distance."

"I really think these will help me. I can see ever so much better, doctor," she declared, running over the leaves of the book.

"That is the intention."

"I will pay for them now," she added, turning to the dresser for her purse.

"No." He was sitting with Ruth on his arm.

"Oh, but yes."

"No, these I present to you with my compliments."

"Indeed, doctor, you must not embarrass me," she

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said, coming to his side and taking money from her purse. "I insist on paying for these."

"And I ask leave to present them to you as a little compliment. It gives me some pleasure, I confess it, to provide these for your personal comfort. I am indebted to you for numberless hints that have contributed to mine."

"All the same, I shall pay you, doctor," she contended, putting money into his hand.

He raised his hand and looked at the crumpled bill she had given him.

"This is your money."

"Yes."

"Money you earned."

"Yes."

"You worked for it."

"Yes."

"May my hand wither and my cunning desert me when I take a dollar of it for anything I can do for you or for Ruth." The dinner bell rang. He rose. "Don't look that way," he said sheepishly. "If I kept your money I should only have it framed and hung up in my room. Then people would ask questions about it."

He opened her purse in her hands and stuffed the bill back into it, trying lightly to dispel her gravity.

"You ought not to put me under obligations I can never repay," she protested seriously.

"Nonsense. You've sent me two patients within a month."

"That isn't the same thing."

"No, it's more—a good deal more. Talk about obligations; there are none equal to referred business;

Doctor Bryson

and what about those handkerchiefs you embroidered at Christmas—”

“That you never use.”

“They are too fine to use. They cost your eyes and fingers too much. You ought to have been asleep when you were doing them; and whenever I dropped in and asked questions you put them away. Demure, weren’t you? And told stories about—”

“It’s time for dinner,” she exclaimed. “Come, Ruth, where’s your hair ribbon, child? Hurry down, doctor, do. Miss June will be angry.”

“Well, she’s not afraid of me, is she? You’ve heard her say that. Now I’m not afraid of her and I’m not done yet.”

“Please, won’t you go down now?”

“And yet you say you never have your way,” he argued as he started out. “Even Ruth pushes me from the door,” he added, for Ruth in her infantile, persistent way, was urging him along. “Ruth, you’re mean to me.”

“Oh, no, I’m hungry, doctor, that’s all.”

“Put on your glasses, at least,” he insisted, turning to Mrs. Eliot, as the three walked downstairs; and she entered the dining-room wearing the glasses. And Mrs. Goddard, who knew her business perfectly, said they were *very* becoming.

One evening afterward they were in the parlor with June. Mrs. Eliot was at the piano. She rose for a music book.

“Do you remember once you offered to give me a lesson?” said he, rising from his chair and straddling the piano stool. She laughed.

Doctor Bryson

"When will you be ready to begin?"

"I'm ready now. Go ahead." The idea amused her.

"Very well," she replied, standing at his shoulder.

"Can you read notes?"

"I can't do anything."

"Never mind, we'll begin at the beginning. Now this is the staff. These we call lines and these spaces. You will never have the patience, doctor, to go through all this."

"Is it all necessary in order to learn music?"

"Yes."

"Then go ahead until *you* are tired."

They worked, half serious, half playful, for an hour.

"Really, I'm amazed," declared Mrs. Eliot, "not that you learn so fast, but that you persist so well."

"You play now," said he, rising.

"What shall I play?"

"Chopin."

She chose the Opus 37 Nocturne in the major, and as it rippled from her hands gave it the atmosphere of evening. The technic was as nothing; she was mistress of every dripping chord and phrase to the very last. He bent forward when she had finished. "Your fingers," he mused, "are like fairies. Did they fly so when they embroidered those handkerchiefs for me?"

"They have to fly when I'm at work."

"Have you ever studied the anatomy of the hand?" he asked, taking hers with a startling and scientific hardihood. "Yours is peculiar in this, the length of the—"

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"Oh, I don't know anything about anatomy," she exclaimed, slipping her fingers from between his. "Tell me about that poor little boy whose eye you took out last week. Has he been back? I told Ruth about him last night; she cried herself to sleep over it."

The next night they were all down town at a music recital. Bryson, who came home late, did not go. After he had eaten dinner June found him in the parlor, alone, practising finger exercises. With some joking from the evil-disposed, as he called those that made fun of him, he practised every evening for a week. Yet there was not too much of levity, for no one considered Bryson a subject for unlimited joking. Even Mrs. Eliot couldn't believe he was actually in earnest. He would strum at his exercises, wander up and down the parlor for a while, sit down again and work harder than ever. On Sunday after dinner he looked in on Mrs. Eliot. She was reading to Ruth.

"I'm ready for another lesson," he said, leaning against the door jamb. She laughed quizzically from behind her eyeglasses. "You're joking."

"Not a bit of it. I'm learning music for a purpose."

"Pray what?"

"I am constantly consulted on ear and throat troubles, and the treatment of them is greatly helped by an acquaintance with music and musical sounds. That's why I want it; simple, isn't it?"

Mrs. Eliot closed her book and sprang up. "Is there really something I can do for you? Thank heaven! I shall work you to death at the scales. Come right along."

After the lessons he would ask her to play, and

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she, at her best—elate, careful and as near happy as she ever allowed herself to get—played laughingly, dramatically, martially or dreamily; whatever the hour, the impression of the day on her heart, the mood of her listener.

"You are tired to-night," he said one evening when she suggested going down to the parlor for a lesson, "let it go."

"I'm not tired."

"Oh, yes," he repeated, quietly conclusive, "you are."

"Not too tired; never too tired for a lesson," she smiled, weariness sweet in her eyes.

"As I am never too tired for a patient."

They went down to the piano. John and Bowles were playing cards upstairs with Mrs. Goddard and Miss Montague. The lesson went stupidly; they gave over presently and fell to talking.

"I am beginning to worry about you. You are working too hard," he said, clasping his hands over his knee as he sat on the piano stool, "that's what's the matter. Or else—" he added, studying her unreservedly, "you are worrying about something."

"I shall have to go into Christian Science," said she, leaning forward and taking her glasses on her finger.

"It is one of the two," he persisted. "Which?"

"Oh, neither. I'm just tired to-night, that's all. By the way, did June tell you Mrs. Ledgcott has taken up Christian Science? She has; she's studying to be a healer."

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"I'm not going to let you kill yourself," said he steadily.

"I decided some years ago I couldn't do that," she replied, without an inflection to bring out the double sense. "Come, let us go up to Mrs. Goddard's. You promised to join them."

"Sit down. Why won't you talk about your health a moment?"

"I haven't any to talk about."

"By Jove, I'm afraid that will be so if you keep on in this way. Did you note what I said? I don't intend to let you kill yourself."

"I heard. Let us go and play cards."

"Marvellously elusive, but let me tell you—" She was standing near; putting out one hand, he took her wrist, and his fingers, slipping over her own, held them firmly. "Don't run away. Why?"

"I must."

"I was only going to say, you are wonderfully shy, but you will not prevent me one day with all your pretty shyness from telling you—" She pulled away from him. "Not yet—from telling you you are too dear, too lovely a woman to wear yourself out in this way." She struggled to get loose. He clung to her hand, held it fast in both his. Her face was turned, her eyes shut, but she could not shut her ears. "If you never give me a chance I shall make a chance sometime to tell you I worship you from the soles of your feet to your brown hair."

"Don't, don't."

"Helen!"

"Don't!"

Doctor Bryson

"I will. I love you."

"Doctor," will you spare me?" she begged, retreating.

"Haven't I spared you months and months?"

"You must not, must not, talk like this," she whispered in fright, turning suddenly from him. Her efforts to escape only made the situation worse. When, hopeless, she looked into his face, his eyes terrified her, but she knew she must look to be master, and desperately firm, she struggled in his arms. There was a crash behind her as if the house were falling. It came like an earthquake, and while she panted at him he stood disarmed. In a few steps and fewer seconds they had got from the rear of the parlor to the front, toppled over the gilt tabouret in the window, and June's one bit of "virtue," a World's Fair dancing girl, had gone smash through the plate glass window.

"Confound the bric-a-brac," muttered Bryson, suppressing a nervous laugh. "I've roused the house." While they stared at the disaster June screamed from the foot of the basement stairs. "What's that?"

"Will you forgive me?" he asked, collecting his dignity and bending courtier-like.

"It's only the dancing girl," cried Mrs. Eliot with a wobbly note in her voice.

"Which one?" bawled Bowles from above stairs. They heard hurried steps in the upper hall. At the same moment the door bell rang violently. June, hurrying forward in the hall, halted appalled by the confusion. "You haven't said you would forgive me," she heard in low tones from the parlor. "Oh, yes, yes. Go say something to them." Even this

Doctor Bryson

suppressed dialogue did not reassure June. Again the door bell rang impudently.

"Why don't you go to the door, June?" asked Bryson, appearing unruffled at the portières.

"Why, lordy, I'm afraid to. What's happened? You go yourself."

With an impatient "Nonsense," Bryson, stepping forward, opened the hall and the vestibule doors. A policeman, confronting him, touched his hat. The patrolmen all knew Bryson.

"Anythin' wrong in your parlor, doctor? I happened to be passin'."

"Nothing whatever. I happened to knock over the dancing girl in the window—"

"I like that," called Bowles, leaning forward from the head of the stairs. "What did she ever do to you? Run him in anyway, Steve. A man that'll strike a defenceless woman—"

"She's out there in the snow," continued the doctor, evenly; "if you can find her bring her in—"

"And receive the reward," interposed Bowles.

Everybody in the house was in the parlor by that time. Bryson in the middle of the circle stood perfectly collected. The policeman found the unlucky marble in the snow, but it had lost an arm, "to the glass," as Bowles put it, and June looked doleful. "You brought me that from the World's Fair, doctor," she said regretfully.

"Never mind, I'll bring you two to-morrow. Gentlemen, resume your game."

The policeman promised a glazier early. They rolled the piano up against the shivered pane and went back

Doctor Bryson

to the cards. When the party broke up the doctor managed a word with Mrs. Eliot at her door. "You bore the thing bravely well; thank you. I was paralyzed when I saw the policeman. I was afraid then you would ask for the fire department. Do you forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive."

Next morning everybody remembered, about the same time, that no explanation of the accident had been asked or offered; but it seemed late to start an inquiry.

CHAPTER XII

“**I** WILL not let you kill yourself working, that’s all. I’ll try not to smash any more windows; but you know now, perhaps you knew before—” he was saying. She sat in the window seat looking out on the lake. He was close by on a stool.

“I know, only you have no right to say what I have no right to hear. I did not sleep last night—”

“Nor did I—”

“Then you must have said to yourself what I said to myself—that I must go away from here.”

“Well, no, I didn’t, to tell the truth. It wouldn’t better matters any to go away. If you go away I must follow.”

“Don’t threaten me.”

“I don’t. I only tell you what must be. I don’t know what would happen to me if I couldn’t see you any more. Yes, it has come to that; I can’t help it, Helen. You might as well talk to the waves out there—I have told myself all you have told me this week. I have considered your position and mine; I love you. While you are here I can stand it. I couldn’t stand it if you were somewhere else, overworking, neglecting your health; distressed; sick. Ask anything but that. Why should you be so afraid of me that you want to leave?”

“I am not afraid of you. How much, how much do I not owe to your generous kindness; but can that

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blind me to what is right and inexorable? I have made this trouble for myself. I must abide it."

"I cannot understand why you feel so and talk so about divorce. You ought to be divorced from that man if you never married again in the world. You say you care nothing for him. You say you have put him as far as you are able out of your life. He's dead, that's the word you used. If he's dead, damn it, why not bury him?"

She put a light hand on his arm. "Please don't swear."

"It's a swearing job, as my father used to say when my mother reproved him."

"Your father and mother are both dead, you told me—"

"Yes. I had a good father and a good mother."

"Did your mother believe in divorce?"

"No—I imagine she didn't." He tried to speak further, but she would not let him. "I remember," she interposed, "in our little town where I grew up—it's a big town now—there was one divorced woman; they used to point her out—"

"That's all very well, but we don't live in that way now. If a man deserts a woman after he's lived upon her and spent all her money she ought to get a divorce and be done with it."

"I am done with it long ago. I am divorced as much as I can be rightly. If I should get a divorce what would it be for? To marry again; and while he lives? I have no right to do that—"

"The law says you have."

She shook her head. "Not God's law."

Doctor Bryson

"What's the use of binding yourself by a law nobody pays any attention to? After all, what is there to it but what you refuse to tell me? Whether you could love me or not?"

She sprang from her seat and wrung her hands. "It's not right to ask." He turned his head in impatience.

"Ask me if I would care for you if you were sick," she trembled suddenly. "If I would go cold to keep you warm, hungry to feed you, blind for you to see. I would. Yes, I would. You have saved Ruth's sight. I tell you I would give my sight for you."

"Then you do answer me. You do love me."

"But I am a married woman—I don't pretend to be a good Christian woman. I don't go to church, as I should; I neglect things I should not neglect. But I am married to that man, God help me. He is the father of my poor little girl. While he lives he is my husband; I can't help it. I can't brand myself, or if I could I can't brand this child with the disgrace of a divorce. Leave that for the herd of women like Mrs. Ledgcott—for boarding-house women. I am not like them."

"Don't I know it?"

"I can't be like them."

"That's why I love you," he cried, stretching out his hands.

"If he were dead—"

"I'd like to kill him."

She shuddered. "Don't say that, even in a joke. You say you care for me—"

Doctor Bryson

"I say I worship you. I'll fall to the ground before you—"

"No, no, stop. Let me speak. If I had a right to hear what you say no prouder woman would breathe."

"Helen!"

"Don't frighten me out of my wits, let me speak now, once for ever. If you care for me remember you place yourself on as high a pedestal as you place me. I must see you always high, generous, noble, as you have been in my sight ever since the moment you turned your kind eyes on me and my child the day that you gave us a cup of water."

He put out his hands appealingly. She waved him away, and sinking into her chair, hid her eyes and cried desperately.

Sometimes she was remorseful. Something depended on her physical condition, and when sick, weary with care, she would accuse herself. "If I had run from you when you finished with Ruth this would never have happened."

"Say if you could have run. I do not think you could. I should have followed you, I believe, to the ends of the earth."

"But how could I even have attempted it? I felt afraid, oh, even then I felt afraid, knowing my position. Can we crush gratitude in our hearts? And without money to pay you at once and feeling that I must pay along as I could, I worried, stayed, like a wretch."

Doctor Bryson

"You are wild to speak so. You are an angel and I love you."

"I am a wretch and I know it. If it had not been for me you would have loved some one that had a right to your love."

"Do you want me to love some one else?"

"I want you to be happy. You deserve happiness. Do you understand? I want you to be happy and I keep you from happiness—"

"You won't forever—"

"God forbid! But even if I—if you—oh, I cannot say, I can only suffer and make you suffer, for I am bound. I cannot do what you ask, nor be what you would have—let us go out—downstairs."

The situation was known to all the little company. Neither from him nor from her—by slightest act or intention. Not even from a hint dropped or a word breathed from one to another of the household, for none was ventured. None spoke of the situation, all accepted it. There was a change in both—Bryson was never a man, even in his freest boylike moods, to suggest familiarity; but after she from her place at the table looked at him no longer shyly or avoidingly, but calmly and clearly, with confidence in gaze and word, in appeal to his knowledge, his judgment, his understanding; when she let it, by so much, be known that she no longer eluded his look, but bore it, she set him on a new plane in the little world. For herself there was no more of shrinking attitude, halting look or timid word. There came to her a superbly dainty haughtiness, as of one who better knows herself; who believes once more in herself be-

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cause a man believes in her—one, too, before whom men lay tribute and who in turn by marked consideration lays tribute before her. She was no longer a woman in exile, she was a woman enthroned; and her sovereignty, pouring loveliness into a cup already full, made of it a cup running over, and he drank of her deeper and deeper.

In another way she changed. She no longer framed excuses to avoid his invitations to drive and to go. When he asked she went. She was only firm that the forms be all observed—that if he took her in the stanhope Ruth should be tucked in, or in the trap that Mrs. Goddard be taken or Miss Montague. She no longer sought to avoid being seen with him in public. If he asked her to go to the play or to a concert, or the opera, he provided tickets for a party and she made one. Ruth he would not let go down town at night on account of her eyes, for he never lost care of them, and there were for him spectres of consequences from the operation that no one else knew of. If no others were going, and he and Helen Eliot wanted to go, June was dragged along, and June sat loyally with her bad eye on their near side, so there could be no thought of offensive espionage, though all that was of her own imagination. There was an espionage in the dark eyes of Helen, a sensitiveness to all that was fitting so exquisite that none greater and none other was needed; nor could another where she reigned have been exercised.

Still another change took place. She became adviser to him, instead of the old way in which he had made himself adviser to her. In business matters he

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asked her judgment, told her his plans, and hopes and disappointments and triumphs, and she softened his bitterness and divided his plans and hopes and disappointments, and doubled his satisfactions. These greater, more vital changes paved the way for lesser ones; at least for those which, if equally significant, were slighter. Certain ties he had affected were laid by; certain light suits for which he had a weakness were discarded, and his gloves and hats fell into a tone that was darker and quieter. He became marked for a man of taste who, without apparent effort, stood well dressed. Indeed, there was no effort beyond the effort to read the eyes that smiled upward on a success, or the brows that just rose into question at a note marring the standard she set for him.

Naturally graceful and gracious in manner, he became in the trifle of apparel precise. He learned aptly from her those points that a man should learn from a woman; for if he be born with such niceties their manifestation will so encroach on the prerogatives of her sex that men may question his own.

Together with all this came a new prosperity and graver responsibilities in his practice, and these, he insisted, were due partly to her. In the morning, if she would not go down with him, he presented himself to her to say good-by. If for that day a major operation was on hand he would tell her and she would ask, smiling, "How are your nerves?"

Then he would take between the thumb and forefinger of either hand a needle, and extending his arms, bring the points together and hold them dead against each other until she said "Enough." Or he would

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take the water bottle and a glass and pour until the water, heaped upon the rim, shivered brimming. But while he held it no drop spilt unless, perhaps, she put out her own hand to take it to test her nerves. If she did so, when her fingers touched his, the water shook and broke over as tears well from full eyes. Once when she did hold the full glass triumphantly he cried "Boo!" and the glass slipped from her fingers and crashed to the floor. With a boy's laugh he caught her hands in his, and stooping, lightning-like, kissed her fingers. The offended hands flew behind her back.

"Oh—you have abundance of nerve this morning, sir," she exclaimed, flushing.

"What's the matter?" demanded June, peering cloudily in from the hall upon her protégés.

"More of your cut glass," replied the doctor, stooping to help Mrs. Eliot pick up the pieces. "She will break everything in your house."

"It was your fault," retorted Mrs. Eliot, pointedly.

"Well, the Lord knows where the money is coming from to buy more!" grumbled June, passing on.

"What does she mean?" asked Bryson.

"There's something the matter," replied Mrs. Eliot in a half whisper. "I don't know what. June has been cross for a week. I'm afraid she's been running behind in her money matters. Now will you please go about your business?"

When Bryson returned to his room June was in it picking up. "What's the matter with you, June," he demanded. "You're getting as cross as a bear."

"I guess you'd get cross," she answered, "if things went with you the way they do with me. You can be

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cross when you want to, so can Mr. Bowles, so can everybody else. But if I give out everybody says I'm a bear."

"Who said you were a bear?"

"You did."

"Look here, what's the matter? Come, out with it, June." It took urging to make her speak, for June was not what gamblers call a "squealer." Nothing less than absolute insolvency forced from her the reluctant admission that she was behind in her bills. Doctor Bryson questioned her sharply for a few minutes. June went all to pieces and couldn't then remember head or tail of her liabilities. The doctor finally took out a pencil, picked up a sheet of paper and tried to make a schedule.

"Come," said he, "how much do you owe your grocer?"

"I get my meats and groceries all together."

"Well, how much?"

"I don't know; it's a pile."

"A hundred dollars?"

"Law sakes, it's more than that."

"Two hundred?"

"I d' know."

"Five hundred?"

"My grief, no. Do you think I'm running the Auditorium?"

"Say two hundred and fifty then."

"It ain't that much." The doctor put down two hundred and fifty.

"How much for rent?"

"A hundred and ninety dollars."

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"Two months, all right. What else?"

"There's a coal bill—"

"How much? A hundred dollars?"

"No-o-o," protested June, indignantly.

"Well, how much?"

"It's some'eres around ninety-five dollars."

"Humph. What else?"

"Ice cream."

"How much?"

"A hundred and ten dollars."

"One hundred and ten dollars! For heaven's sake!
How much a day does it cost you for ice cream?"

"I d'n' know."

"How long do you let your ice cream bills run—"

"Just as long as I can; it's a trust, you know."

"I should say it was a trust. Why, June, hang it, you're 'busted.' What else is there?" June meditated through her liquid eye.

"There's a bill of sixty-eight dollars for beer and things."

"Beer? Sixty-eight dollars! Why, heavens and earth, who has drunk sixty-eight dollars' worth of beer here? Is this a blind pig? I never saw a dozen bottles of beer in this house at once in my life."

"Well, it's charged to me."

"Charged to you!" echoed the doctor, scornfully.
"Go get your bill."

She shuffled after it, Bryson stalking behind her, down into the dining-room. June rummaged the gravy boats and the soup tureens in the china closet, the cracker jars on the sideboard, and at last from a dismantled chafing dish produced several bills and in-

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spected them closely. "There," said she, putting one at him.

"This is only six dollars and eighty cents," remarked Bryson.

"Go 'way!" exclaimed June, looking at the figures incredulously. Then she looked foolish and grinned. The doctor eyed her coldly. "June, you're the biggest idiot on earth."

"Is that all it is?"

"Yes, that's all it is."

"Well, I don't care, here's one that's big enough," she snapped, putting another at him.

"What's this for?"

"I didn't speak about it upstairs because I was afraid to. It came this morning and I couldn't eat a bite of breakfast after I saw it."

"Why, this is for beer and every other old thing—" Bryson devoured the total at one fell glance. It was a big bill from the same firm—a hundred and twelve dollars. There was beer, there was champagne, there were liqueurs on it, cigars, cocktails in cases. The items would stock a saloon. Bryson stared at the bill, stared at his landlady, and at the bill again—and started.

"Why, you—see here, you goose, this isn't your bill at all—"

"It ain't?"

"If you wouldn't drive a man to drink! This bill is for James Battershaw, 814 Grant Avenue." June screamed. "James may be a tank," continued the doctor. "It looks as if he were, but that's no reason why you should pay his bills."

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"Well, what did they send it to me for?" demanded June angrily.

"Oh," Bryson shook his head and ground his teeth, "do you suppose you have to pay all the bills sent you by mistake?"

"Lord, heavens, don't take my head off! I didn't see who the old bill was billed to, did I?"

"Come upstairs—no—sit right down here." Bryson took from his pocket a small book. He had his pen in his hand and drew a check for six hundred dollars, payable to the order of the biggest fool in Chicago, as June confidentially told Mrs. Eliot that night.

"Now use a little horse sense and keep even—pay cash for what you buy. Don't run bills. If you haven't sense enough to know what bills belong to you, don't run any, see?"

"He's the biggest hearted man in Chicago," muttered June, telling Mrs. Eliot about it. Bryson was down town at a club meeting that evening. He came home late. June and Mrs. Eliot, sitting before her grate, were just parting for the night; he came in, drew a chair to the fire and sat down.

"June, make me a hot lemonade, will you?" said he. "I got chilled in the car."

"Did you have a pleasant meeting?" asked Mrs. Eliot as June started for the kitchen.

"So, so. What sort of a looking man is Eliot? I believe I was introduced to him to-night."

She was not able to speak for a minute. "What makes you think so? What did he want?"

"What sort of a looking man is he? Have you a photograph of him?"

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"I have one picture of him," she answered after a pause, "an ivorytype; but over the face of it I have cemented a piece of black silk, and I keep it for Ruth. Some day she may want to see her father's face. Don't ask me to try to describe him. For my part I do not allow myself even to think of him."

"This man is baldish and slowish in his manner. Cheekbones are high, and he has a plump face and a lying kind of a laugh, and his name, well, there's his card: Gregory B. Eliot."

She grew pale. "What can he want with you? What can he want?"

"I can't imagine. He doesn't know me from Adam."

"Don't be sure. He has a petty cunning. He has seen us somewhere together. What can he want?" She was much disturbed.

"Never mind what it is, I don't care," said he. "He said he wanted to call on me sometime to-morrow. An insurance man, McKellor, introduced him in the smoking-room at the Athletic Club. Dresses pretty well."

"He always did," she said coldly.

"I told him to come at twelve o'clock or three. That's all the talk we had. Possibly I was a little stiff with him. June, you're an angel," he exclaimed, taking the pitcher and a cup from the tray.

"This morning I was the biggest fool on earth."

"You are yet, or you wouldn't be down in the kitchen at twelve o'clock making me hot lemonade," said Bryson conclusively, as he filled a cup for Mrs. Eliot.

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"No, thank you."

"June?"

"No."

"Oh, come, I'm not going to drink all alone. You must drink a little, Mrs. Eliot."

"Just a drop then."

"You'd both better drink with me to-night," he laughed, "I may be past drinking this time to-morrow night."

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. ELIOT was first in the dining-room next morning, and she looked pleased when Doctor Bryson came next.

"You've been worrying," said he, sprinkling sugar on his berries. "What's the matter?"

"I've worried all night about his asking to see you. There's some mischief brewing or he would not be calling on you. He is plausible—perhaps dangerous. I want to ask you some favors. I, who am always beggar to you and give you nothing in return—"

"You give me all that makes life worth living—"

"Don't say that."

"Hope, friendship, confidence, and sometimes love. Do you hear me? Love."

"Doctor," she exclaimed, in desperation, "the whole house will hear you."

"And I don't care a rap for this man or what he may say about my acquaintance with you."

"But promise me something. I must talk quickly before anybody comes. Promise me you won't have any angry words; no trouble of any kind—"

"You don't want me to hurt him?"

"Don't be perverse. You know what I want. But there's something more, and I don't know—this is what I have been worrying about."

"Don't worry; tell me."

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"You won't be angry, will you?"

"With you?"

"Ah! with me." She looked intently at him. "You may be sometime. No matter, I am blue this morning. He may say something about a divorce. He is capable of baseness. I want you to say frankly you have befriended me as well as my child; and that you know that I will neither institute nor ever consent to a divorce. Not alone on my account, but on account of Ruth, who would have the disgrace upon her. Tell him I will support her, as I have done every day since she was born—"

He muttered an execration.

"But if he tries to drag me into divorce I will fight him. I will tell my story to the court. I will leave nothing undone to pillory him if he forces me to it. Can you bring yourself to say that for me to him?"

"I thought you didn't want angry words."

"Don't lower yourself to his level, doctor," she answered, with dignity. "That is what I meant. If I did not know you would not I should have said nothing. Remember, if you speak, you speak for me; and you do it because I am friendless and you are generous," she concluded, unsteadily, ringing for his breakfast.

"How can that be?"

"What?"

"That you are friendless and I am generous?"

She paid him with a look. "I shouldn't have said so, should I? I am not friendless. And do you know what I pray for every night," she asked, leaning forward and speaking low, "I pray for your success

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and happiness, and most of all—that no evil may befall you through me, doctor.”

“I will take everything, whatever befalls me through you, good or evil—all.”

“I don’t want anything but good to befall you from anybody. June said last night you were the best man in the world,” she added quizzically.

“What did you say?”

“Don’t ask me what I said,” her voice dropped to a murmur, “ask me what I thought.”

“Tell me!”

“Good-by.”

“Why, you’re going to eat your breakfast?”

She shook her head. “After you come back to-night. I can’t eat now.”

“See here, that won’t do,” he exclaimed, half rising just as June came behind the maid from the kitchen. “You must eat. Take a roll and coffee at least. June, see to it,” scowled the doctor. “No nonsense.”

Mrs. Eliot wrung her hands at him. “Very well, very well! only don’t get excited, please.”

When Bryson had gone Mrs. Eliot went upstairs, put on her hat, walked over to the drug store and by telephone cancelled her lessons for the day. With the income always so close to the outgo it was a heart-breaking thing to do; but to-day, with her head splitting, she knew she could not teach. Getting home, she began sewing on a dress for Ruth. After breakfast June went up to her room and would not be comforted till she was made partner in the dreadful anxiety. When June started downstairs to prepare luncheon a messenger rang the bell. He brought a note from Doc-

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tor Bryson to June scratched on a prescription blank. "Go to the matinee this afternoon." The tickets were inclosed. June ran upstairs, her eyes bulging with joy. "Look here; matinee tickets for you and me and Ruth."

Mrs. Eliot looked surprised and pleased, but her anxious expression returned. "You take Ruth, June. I can't go," she pleaded, her fingers flying with a needle.

"Can't? Well, I guess you can. You've got to. Put away that dress and get into your gown as quick as the Lord will let you."

"June, I must finish this to-day."

"I'll help you finish it to-night. Stop objecting and get dressed. He'll be mad as a hatter if I go and you don't; and you can just come along. Here, Ruth; I'll dress you."

Half an hour later, when Mrs. Eliot came down ready to start, Mrs. Goddard and June and Ruth were at luncheon.

"Wish I could make a picture of myself as quick as that woman can," exclaimed June to Mrs. Goddard as Mrs. Eliot took her seat. "Just look at her. Why, she looks so fresh it's scandalous." The door bell rang. "What on earth's that?"

It was another messenger; another note. This one for Mrs. Eliot.

"Nobody here at twelve o'clock. It is one and I am off for lunch. I forgot to send June a railway ticket. Please hand her this. H. E. B."

On the way to the train Mrs. Eliot handed the commutation ticket to June. "He sent it down," she said.

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"Was that what he sent?" cried June. "Spends fifty cents on a messenger to save us twenty-five cents car fare and then calls me a financial idiot. Some men have a wonderful opinion of themselves."

The play was "Secret Service," and the player William Gillette, and the sweep of the action left no interval for additional worry even between acts, for the spell of the actor bridged over the wait. As they crushed out of the narrow lobby after the performance a colored boy elbowed his way to Mrs. Eliot and touched his hat. It was Jim.

"Doctor Bryson is just around the corner on La Salle Street, waiting in the coupé."

It was raining. Jim had umbrellas, and the doctor himself stepped out of the carriage as they approached. His face was bright. Mrs. Eliot looked narrowly at him.

"Did he come, doctor?" she asked as they rolled through the gloom past the City Hall.

"Yes."

"I told June about it."

"Oh, did you," said the doctor, unbuttoning his secretiveness. "By Jove," he added, "he and I had a lively time."

"How?" asked Mrs. Eliot, feverishly.

"You told me not to have any angry words with him."

"Yes."

"Well, he struck me."

"Struck you?" echoed both women together. "What for?" demanded June, furiously.

"Two hundred and fifty."

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"What?"

"Two hundred and fifty. He wanted to borrow two hundred and fifty dollars. That's true, on my honor." June looked from one to the other of them, twinkling.

"But was that all?" asked Mrs. Eliot, faintly.

"Who is it, mamma?" asked Ruth.

"Somebody you don't know, dear."

"That was practically all."

"Of course you didn't let him have it?"

"No. But I'll be hanged if I didn't feel mean in refusing him."

"I'm not surprised. He has a gift of talking money out of people," she said, taking a deep breath. "I can't think it's over."

"Neither can I," returned Bryson, still laughing. "I didn't tell you how I was stewing over it all last night: the thing was so loaded with possibilities. But of all the proposals I expected to receive, the last was an invitation to buy stock. It was a good story—a mining proposition—strictly regular—would sell some shares. But I didn't want to buy. Then he wanted to leave ten thousand shares with me to secure a temporary advance. Oh, these people that are trying to get something out of nothing. However, all's well that ends well. I wouldn't lose any more sleep over *that* personage. The question is—what are we going to have for dinner to-night?"

It was no trick to enliven June, but Doctor Bryson succeeded even in pulling Mrs. Eliot out of her despondency by sheer force of his own humor. Before they reached the boulevard he had tapped, for their

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diversion, a store of dramatic incidents from the College grind, and by the time they reached home he had Ruth wide-eyed on his lap, June breathless at his side, and Mrs. Eliot in a state of diverted admiration.

John Allison happened to be in New York and Miss Montague in London, but that evening they built a roaring big fire in the den. Mrs. Goddard, Mrs. Eliot, June and Ruth and the doctor with common cheer defied the chill and the wet together. By a serious stretch of the Eliot regulations Ruth was allowed to sit up till nearly ten o'clock; or rather, they were telling stories so fast that nobody noticed her. When June walked downstairs, Ruth went to undress, and in a few minutes ran back, all curly-haired and sleepy-eyed, in her night gown, to kiss everybody by-bye. Then, like a little pink Miss Netticoat, leaving a shine in every heart behind, she shuffled after her mother to be tucked into bed.

June returned with a chafing dish, a maid, a loaf of bread, four bottles of beer, a jar of stuffed mangoes and an alarming portion of cheese. The maid they dismantled and dismissed. Mrs. Eliot, rigged in an apron flowing with ruffles, and a cap no more than a cobweb, took command. Bryson at the grate struggled with the toast. Mrs. Goddard, to pay her way, sat back and told stories. June opened the beer and Mrs. Eliot sliced cheese into the chafing dish. The rarebit was "on."

It was a good company. Three women, each of them a marked type in the wonderful gallery of American women, and one strong, successful, quick-witted American man. The supper over, June, with a house-

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keeper's iconoclasm, gathered up the spoil. Mrs. Goddard went upstairs for her beauty sleep, and Mrs. Eliot left for her room. Bryson, buried in a chair, lingered in front of the dying fire.

A light step coming back aroused him.

"I forgot to thank you for the entertainment this afternoon—"

"Oh, is it you?" he exclaimed, attempting to rise. Standing just at his side, she put a hand lightly on his shoulder. "Sit still—"

"But you sit, too."

"No. I am going right to bed. I enjoyed the play so much. It is such a great play for action and ingenuity—"

"Tell me about it, do."

"I was thinking, just now, you do me so many kindnesses that I am growing like a spoiled child who accepts favors and forgets the thanks."

"Tell me about the play." The fingers of his right hand crept stealthily over to his shoulder where hers, timid as hares, rested. He sought neither to grasp nor detain them. If he had, there would have been excuse to draw them away. Instead, barely touching her fingers at first, while she talked, he gradually slipped his hand under her own.

"You are very, very quiet in your chair, doctor," she said, after she had finished telling about "Secret Service," "but your head is very, very busy, do you know that?" she asked, bending a little above him.

"Why so?"

"You knew I wouldn't let you take my hand, and yet you have made me take yours or seem positively

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mean. But do you know I didn't venture back here to hold your hand. I could have done that all the evening while the others were here."

"That would have been dangerous, wouldn't it?"

"Not nearly so dangerous as this. I know I am on thin ice; I do not deceive myself even if I appear to. But knowing it is my safety, for it makes me have care. And though you are a man, you are a brave and generous one. I dare even tell you of it."

"Sit down; I want to talk to you."

"I will stand."

"You must sit a moment. Sit here on the arm of the chair."

"This stool will do," she said, drawing one up beside him. "Go on. Just a minute, remember."

"I've been sitting here trying to think—I've been all day trying to think—why you will remain tied to that man. Why you won't get a divorce and be free and be happy and make me happy."

"You include too much, doctor." She turned and faced him. "Do you think I don't want to be happy? or don't want you to be? You deserve to be; I don't. But no good ever can or ever will come on this earth from doing wrong. To divorce myself from him more than I am divorced, to divorce myself to marry again while I have a husband living would be a sin: a shame and disgrace to me and to the man I should marry. But even if I could bear to do that for myself and for him, and soothe my conscience to sleep under it—how could I bear to disgrace Ruth—my little innocent girl? And if she grew up and went to the divorce court herself—or worse—what could I say? Do I not owe

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more to this unfortunate child than to myself? It isn't her wish that she is here. Her father is what he is. But if she can say her mother was all she ought to have been, can she not still hold up her head?"

"You start by assuming divorce is wrong; a sin, a disgrace. If it is, why do our laws sanction it, our churches sanction it—"

"How can I answer for all the sins that hide behind courts and churches? Don't ask me to do that—I have no church. I have only one guide—my conscience; only one life to look to, only one word to listen to—Christ's. Don't you suppose I have cast this over a thousand times since the man I married proved utterly unworthy, and I found my baby in my arms and had to get up with my head swimming with weakness to earn money to feed her?"

He started from his chair. "Don't speak of it. I can't stand that—I can't stand it."

"Never mind. I've taken care of her ever since. You are the first that ever shared in doing it."

"I never have shared. You never would let me."

"You have, in a hundred ways. You are the first I ever allowed to share—"

"Helen, could you altogether help yourself?" he asked, bending over her.

She returned his look unflinchingly. "No. I don't pretend to sanctity. I'm a woman; I kiss the hand that's kind to me and mine. You saved me a greater sorrow than my wretched marriage—Ruth's blindness. I wish she were a boy," she exclaimed; "oh, how I wish she were a boy! God help her, poor little thing:

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no father, no home. I think so often of what you said over poor Johnnie Ledgcott that night."

He sat back and looked into the fire. "Did Eliot," he asked, mildly, "ever complain of his heart?"

"No; why?"

"Nothing."

"But you have reason for asking?"

"Nothing, only I was naturally studying him," he shifted his long legs. "You wouldn't blame me for that—"

"No, no."

"He looked to me like a man with a poor heart action."

"How can you tell?"

"His eyes are bright and prominent like those whose hearts are fatty. Possibly I deceive myself."

"You will never quite understand how I could have made such a horrible mistake," she said, abruptly. "But if you knew his mother it would help you to. Her husband was a great college professor; we put halos around such men in our family when I was a girl. His mother threw a wicked glamour over me because my father was wealthy. She was a big, brawny woman, great in public movements and such things. My mother was dead, I was a poor little conceited innocent of eighteen, and it's all past and done, and it is after twelve o'clock and I am here, where I have no business to be and know it—"

"Don't fly away. Tell me—I'm not a heathen, but I don't pretend to be up on Bible things—how can so many people be wrong on this divorce question?"

"Christ said, 'Whosoever shall marry her that is

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divorced committeth adultery. If a woman shall put away her husband and marry another, she committeth adultery.' ”

There was a distressing silence; she broke it. “Not once, but again and again, he says it of husbands and wives—and I am a wretched wife. I am bound.”

“I don't understand it, Helen. I don't pretend to; but I see everybody getting divorces when they want them, and going about their business just the same. It looks to me pretty tough. We are not different from anybody else, are we?”

There was a pause; then a defiance of the suggestion.

“Yes, we are. You are different from a good many other men; I am from a good many other women. If we were not different we should not be here now together as we are. If I had not clung like a sinking wretch to what is right do you think I need be here to-night without a home and without money?” She stood up, and her voice rang startlingly.

“I could have bought all that—husband and money and home—in the court and in the church, all legally and respectably, before ever I saw you, doctor. But what would have bought it,” she said, almost haughtily, “was not for sale—my conscience. When that goes—look out! Ah-h-h, I'd be a different woman then! Do you imagine I don't like fine things? That I am not flesh and blood?”

“Helen!”

“And you—are you common clay? If you were not ‘different’ how could I have spoken this night to you as I never spoke to man before? To man? No, not

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even to him, I swear, did I ever speak as I have spoken to you. I have never shown so much of my heart as I have shown to-night to you. He chilled and repelled me," she said, turning her head, "and, God forgive me, I detested him the moment I really knew him. And you—you pitied me. You did not talk money. Money! That I could not raise with all the working and all the saving! Money! that I could get only by selling myself. You pitied me when I was helpless; gave your skill like water, like air, like sunshine, to save Ruth. And after that, kindness, liberality; presents by stealth; consideration as delicate as a woman's—as a woman's, do I say? As a man's! And finding at last my ideal—if I could have been wickeder I should never have found him—I find myself chained, gagged, helpless to be what he wants me to be—what I ought to be. And people say there is no hell!"

He found himself on his feet, and her words **mad in his ears; but she was gone.**

CHAPTER XIV

‘YOU need not have run away from me last night.’

“What most I should have said I did not say,” she replied.

It was Sunday morning; the sun was shining. They were walking together in Michigan Avenue.

“I was thinking after I left you,” she went on, “of what worries me so often. I am like one of whom you ask bread, and I give you a stone. Your position in this is worse than mine. You have not forfeited your right to be happy, as I have. If you persist in this feeling you have for me I shall be only a curse to you; that’s what I worry over. I have been selfish enough to speak of what I suffer; what of you and your future?”

“My future is yours.”

“No, it must not be. You must give up the thought of what may never be. You can then be happy. This is right; it is best; and seeing you happy—I speak truly—will be happiness for me.”

“I’d rather share your unhappiness than be happy with another. It is so. I love you. Would you be happy to see me with another woman? Would you?”

“Would you wish to lay bare my heart after I have prayed that happiness may be yours? Yet if you would, you should find it ready for your inspection,

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like a chamber set in order. I would be happy to see you happy."

"I wanted only to know that much, Helen. Let me call you that sometimes. It is your name, and as we stand now we face realities. You have told me your lips are sealed. Forgive me for trying to get behind them. I love you, and to say I love you is only to say you love me; or it is only to ask the question, do you love me? For if I say I love you and you answer I hate you, what would my words amount to? They would mean nothing. If I really love you it is because we love each other."

"May we not talk of something else?"

"Gladly. The more gladly because I know we understand and that contents me. For the rest I can wait."

"No, that is appalling," she exclaimed. "He may outlive us both."

"Something will happen," he persisted. "Everything comes to him who waits, don't you know that?"

"Yes, that and more."

"What do you mean?"

"Suppose there comes a day when your love will no longer be denied."

"What then?"

"I don't know what then. I wish I knew. Sometimes I see misery; sometimes disgrace; sometimes death."

"Never. You are blue; depressed. Cheer up."

"I know I am. I have been trying to fight it off. Something always happens when I get in this way. I was like this before I married."

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He burst into a laugh. She did not seem altogether in sympathy. "Don't be displeased; it sounds so odd," said he in apology. "The mistake you make is in worrying; you're always worrying about something. Just now it seems to be me. I didn't come into your life to make you worry. I came into it to make your cares a little lighter, that's all. To save steps for the feet I love and weariness for the hands I love, and anxiety for the eyes I love, and to keep the gray out of the hair I love; the brown hair; and to keep the aches out of the heart I love—the heart that pumps so hard and so fast when I look close into its windows."

"Dear heaven! Please remember, Doctor Bryson, we are on the street. Don't bend over me quite so dreadfully."

"But you protest so sweetly it makes me fairly topple."

"Will you please remember you are Surgeon-in-chief for the Eye at the Laffin College?"

"Whether I remember it or not, you are not likely to forget it," he replied in banter.

"Certainly not. I am very proud of being the friend of the Surgeon-in-chief, if you want to know it," she retorted with a bewitching dignity of head, "and that's why I object to his making a goose of himself in public."

"You forget, do you not, that he is one of those unfortunate birds that is not permitted to disport itself to any extent in private?" he responded.

She could not answer for the smothered laughing in her eyes, and having got her into his mood of serene

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confidence, he held her in it all day. The afternoon was ideal and Bryson took everybody in turn out to the park, ending after supper with John Allison. The evening was warm and delightful, a moon rising full over the lake. They drove leisurely and late, and when they left the team at the stable to stroll home it was eleven o'clock. Everybody had gone to bed; the night air was warm and the two men sat before the open window in John's room talking till twelve.

In the very dead of the night, when sleep weighs heaviest, there came a tap on Bryson's bedroom door. A timid rapping first and after an interval a second and louder rapping. "What is it?" he called.

"Doctor Bryson?"

"Yes."

"Would you come and look at Ruth a moment, doctor?"

"Certainly."

"She doesn't seem well."

"In just a minute."

It was hardly so long before Mrs. Eliot heard his tap on her sitting-room door.

"Ruth is acting so queerly, doctor," Mrs. Eliot whispered as she opened the door. "She hasn't slept any to speak of." He listened reflectively.

"May I go right into the bedroom?"

"Certainly. I feel conscious-stricken at disturbing you—"

"You did perfectly right," he said in an undertone, following her as she put aside the bedroom portière. Ruth slept in a pretty little brass bed opposite her mother's. The gas burned low at the dresser. Bry-

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son walked lightly across to Ruth. She lay dozing uneasily. Standing above her, spread all over the pillow, he listened a moment, took her pulse in one hand, passed the other over his eyes and pushed the tangle of hair back from his forehead. Mrs. Eliot in a kimono stood with folded hands at the dresser. He motioned to her to turn on the gas, which she did, and pulling up a chair he sat down in silence and for some time watched the sleeping child. After a while Mrs. Eliot tiptoed to his side.

"She seems to be easier now, but she has been so restless and so feverish it alarmed me." He heard without comment, still looking at Ruth, who began again to toss. But with the doctor's coming the restlessness had subsided, and Mrs. Eliot blamed herself for having called him. His face, just out of a heavy sleep, showed in the glare of the gas that which it never showed in daylight, lines of hard work and thought. In his trousers and slippers and shirt, hair awry and heavy-eyed, he looked ten years more than day put upon him.

"Go back to bed, doctor," she whispered. "I have let my fears run away with me and broken your rest for nothing."

He leaned back in his chair. "She isn't well," said he, still looking at Ruth, "a little fever; not much though. She swallows queer. I'll sit here a few minutes. She'll wake pretty soon."

He stretched out his legs, crossed his arms and then his feet. His chin gradually sunk on his breast; in five minutes he slept just as he sat. Mrs. Eliot, sitting over by the bureau, watched the two, almost side by

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side, sleep; her child and her lover. It seemed a long time before Ruth roused; Bryson woke with her first turning. She asked for a drink, and while her mother got it the doctor stepped to his room and back again.

"Sit up, just a minute, Ruth, will you?" asked the doctor, "I want to look at your throat." Her eyes were slightly bloodshot and her cheeks flushed. He sat down on the bed and held her around on his arm so he could see her throat.

"I hope she isn't going to be sick, doctor," ventured her mother.

"She is sick now. I'll go and fix some medicine—have you a teaspoon? Where has she been lately?"

"Nowhere but at school, doctor."

"Are any of the little girls at your school sick, Ruth?"

"No, sir."

"There are only twelve children there. She goes to Miss Chill's."

"Does she go in the street cars?"

"It's just around the corner, you know. She hasn't been in a street car for a week." He made no comment, but went after the medicine.

Among other things he brought a tiny tin box. "Let me look at your throat again, Ruth," said he. "Come over to the light, where I can see. Here, I'll carry you to your mamma's bed," he suggested, bundling her up in his arm. He got her directly before the gas jet, and with her mother's help got a look at her throat clear to the glottis. With his spatula he touched one of her tonsils. Then he carried her all pink and white and curly back to her own bed, and going to the

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table took from it the glass of medicine he had prepared and gave her a dose of it. From a small bottle he gave her a teaspoonful of brandy.

"This will burn, Ruth, but don't mind that. Swallow it, swallow it. Quick!"

"She will doze off again," said he to her mother when the child had done the struggle with the alcohol. Turning to the dresser, he took up the little box, opened it, passed the spatula over the gelatinous substance within, closed the box, and going to Ruth opened her nightgown at the throat and placed the box under her arm. "Now, let me see," he said, methodically reflective. "There's nothing more to do for an hour. I'll stay out here in the sitting-room and you may lie down."

"You may go to bed again. I can give her the medicine."

"No, I want to see her as soon as it's daylight."

"But I will call you."

"You might oversleep."

"Is it anything serious, do you think?"

"It isn't far enough along to say. I merely want to be first in if anything is going to develop. Now you lie down—"

"I'll lie down with Ruth."

"No, I wouldn't do that."

"Why not?"

"She needs all the room she has," he answered evasively. "She might be more wakeful; lie on your own bed." He looked at his watch. "It's three o'clock now. Lie down and get what sleep you can; you haven't had much. I'll nap out here." He dis-

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posed himself by the sitting-room window in a big chair. She softly closed the bedroom door, but instead of lying down began to dress herself. While doing so she heard him at the telephone. She turned the gas low and sat down by Ruth. The night wind rising on the lake blew cool through the north window. She lowered the sash and going to the sitting-room door opened it to see what he was doing. He had thrown himself among the pillows on the couch, and lay on his side fast asleep. It was chilly in the room, and as he lay in his shirt sleeves, clutching the pillow in his arms above his head, he appeared abnormally long. She looked at him a moment, tiptoed back, took a blanket off her own bed, and going to him drew it cautiously over him. He slept heavily. She listened to his breathing, turned the gas low at the head of the couch and bent over him. His hands were clasped. The withered little old woman on whom he had operated came back to her, and, stooping, her breath stole timidly over his closed fingers and her lips touched them; but he slept.

When he woke day was breaking. Mrs. Eliot was sitting near looking out of the south window.

"Has she waked?" he asked, sitting up.

"Not once, and she has been ever so much quieter. I think she is better."

He walked to Ruth, fished his tiny box out from under her arm and slipped it into his vest pocket, went to his room, took a bath and dressed. The door bell rang as he stepped again into the hall and he answered it. Jim had come with the things the doctor had telephoned for.

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"I caught the first car, doctor," said Jim, handing him a package.

"You're in good time. That's right. Go up to the room and stay for your breakfast. Then take this box down to the laboratory straight and ask Kemp to examine it at once. The minute you get the word telephone me what he says. Don't call me up here. Call me up at the drug store."

Returning to Mrs. Eliot's room, he found Ruth awake, her eyes heavy and her cheeks purplish. With her mother's help he got her to the light again and looked at her throat twice, gave her medicine, followed it with a teaspoonful of the fiery brandy and laid her down himself. After breakfast he went over to the drug store and was gone a long time.

When he came back he went in to Ruth. Mrs. Eliot followed him from the sitting-room. "How does she seem, doctor?" He made no answer, but walked to the window and waited for her to join him. "Is she sick?" asked her mother again anxiously.

"Yes."

"What's the matter?"

"Has she ever had any serious throat trouble?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because she has now."

"Oh, doctor, what is it?"

"Don't become alarmed unnecessarily."

"Tell me what it is."

"I'm glad we have it on hand early—"

"Tell me what it is—"

"And for that reason I ask you not to be unnecessarily frightened. It is diphtheria."

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Mrs. Eliot's face faded; in seconds she aged years.

"Diphtheria is serious," she heard him saying quietly, "it is by no means necessarily fatal. There is nothing now to indicate more than an ordinary attack. My dear one," he begged, "control yourself. These things always come unexpectedly. We have it right in the bud. She is in splendid health. Unless extraordinary complications develop she will come out all right."

Mrs. Eliot sank into a chair deadly white. While speaking he had thrown the sash wide for the air. Half fainting, she tried again and again before she could look up at him. When her lips moved no sound came; only her eyes looked prayers into his. He reached for a cologne bottle, and sprinkling his fingers, bathed her temples. As soon as she could raise her own hands she caught his convulsively. "Will you save her?"

"Don't, for God's sake, look like that. Will it make it any easier for me to work? Ruth is not going to die."

"Will you save her?"

"I tell you I will."

"Oh, Johnnie, Johnnie Ledgcott!"

"Everything was against me then, wasn't it? You know that, don't you?" She nodded her head, her eyes were tearless.

"Just be brave—you can help so much. I'll have a nurse here after breakfast. There will be no quarantine, no annoyance of any sort. I will arrange all. We need only have care. I love her. If she were my child instead of yours—if she were our child—I couldn't do more for her than I will do. You need only trust me. Can't you do that?"

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Crying softly then she returned the pressure of his hand. He went in to Ruth. When she followed, Ruth, surrounded by pillows, was sitting up, her head hung in laughter. Doctor Bryson was telling her a droll story about a fine and stylish young darky woman, a very light chocolate colored young darky woman, with red kid gloves and a picture hat and gold-rimmed nose glasses, who wanted her eyes operated on so she could read with them, never having had time, in the regular way, to learn how.

And when Mrs. Eliot left the room again Bryson, with his arm around Ruth, told her confidentially that she was just the least bit sick, but that she must not let her mamma know; and that he would give her a little medicine on the sly, and stay with her himself, and mamma would think they were having an old-fashioned visit together; for, he said, he was all tired out anyway, and meant to stay home from the old College for a few days and rest up.

There were blanched faces at the breakfast table when the word went round. There happened to be at the time in June's household three or four outsiders, as those not in the regular circle were called. In spite of all efforts to quiet the matter there was something like a sensation in the house, and nearly a fight, in which Bowles figured with a bull-necked bachelor, who insisted the child should be sent to an isolation hospital. The bachelor's traps were finally put into the street by Bowles himself, who stripped the offender's room and suggested fumigating it. The enraged bachelor filed a complaint with the health department and within an hour afterward an officer arrived at the house.

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But Doctor Bryson met him with his card and a smile, and wrote a few words on the card to the chief health officer, and that was the end of it. The bachelor man stirred up the papers and three reporters together rang the door bell. But Doctor Bryson again smiled and wrote a few words on a card to the managing editors, and telephoned Bowles, who arranged practically everything. When the bachelor man looked next morning in the papers for his account of the case of malignant diphtheria that was being concealed by a prominent South Side doctor, he couldn't find it. So he wrote an article on the prevalence of pulls in Chicago, and sent it to a New York paper, by which, in due time, it was returned with the intimation that the editors were not at present buying anything but news.

And Ruth, all the time the excitement was raging on her account, was at first sitting up in the bed, with Doctor Bryson telling her funny stories and making her take beef essence and chicken broth that he cooked himself. Yes, he said, he made it himself at the big range, and she *must* take it. And he was always coaxing her to swallow something very fiery that she hated because it burned her throat and choked her so. Then she could no longer breathe and she saw terrible things in the air, and a friend of Doctor Bryson's, from the College, came to see her in the middle of the night—a short, fat, Germany man, with spectacles as thick as bulls' eyes and fighting hair and a touch-me-not mustache. He stayed a long time and stared at her unaccountably, and put a complicated arrangement in her mouth, and peered into her throat till he quite suffocated her and she knew she was going to die. It was

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serious that night. He was a very queer man, to whom everybody paid great deference, and when he tried to say throat, he said "troat," and put his finger on her neck fondly, and felt it all around as if he were feeling for a good soft place to cut into. But Bryson, thoughtful and heavy, shook his head a little. He muttered, "I think not, doctor," and Ruth slept.

She woke again, and it was night; the gas carefully shaded, and a strange lady in a gray striped dress sat smiling at her, and Doctor Bryson stood at the foot of the bed. His hair was tumbled and his arms were folded and he was looking fixedly at her. And she tried to speak, but her throat hurt so dreadfully she could not. She could only gasp and make signs, terribly frightened. And the doctor and the nurse spoke fast and together took her up and worked a long time over her till she could breathe somewhat. Then she went to sleep. But frightful dreams came even after that. A tall, tall man did things that hurt her terribly, and a woman helped with the torture, and her throat was on fire and getting bigger and bigger; but they did not care, though she screamed until she forgot everything and could hear no more save some one moaning at her pillow; and she slept.

And after a long, long time she woke again; and again it was night and the light was very soft, and she told, long, long afterward, of hearing a voice and knowing it was Doctor Bryson's voice; told of hearing him say: "She is going to live."

Then her mother, moaning and sobbing, had thrown herself down and buried her face in the pillow. It seemed so strange to Ruth, with the striped lady bust-

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ling around so sprightly and her mother crying so hard and Doctor Bryson standing at the other side of the bed looking. Only she was very weak, and when she tried to lift her hand she could not. She turned again and closed her eyes, glad she was going to live.

CHAPTER XV

IT was morning next time, and sunshine, and Ruth weakly asked for her mamma. The striped lady said she was in bed. And Ruth asked for the doctor; and the striped lady said *he* was in bed. Then June peered cautiously in from the sitting-room and looked at Ruth as if she had stolen all the jam in the pantry, and been a bad, bad girl generally, and asked many questions of the striped lady. And Ruth, wondering what they were all about, heard them. "Did he use anti-toxine?" asked June with awed curiosity.

"No," answered the striped lady.

"I thought everybody used that."

"He didn't."

"Nor tracheotomy?"

"No."

"My stars! How did he do it?"

"I don't know. I guess he did it with grape brandy and broths and things. 'Stimulation and nutrition,' was all he said to me. I wouldn't want another case like that."

Then Ruth knew after a while that she had been very sick. When her mother came in, Ruth saw how pale and worn she was. So she tried to put her arms up to her mother's neck, but she could not even lift them; her mother had to do that. Then in the early morning the striped lady went away and after nightfall Doctor Bryson would drop in, not forcing a laugh, as he did

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when she was very sick, but really jolly again and with some new joke that make everybody else jolly, for the anxious hours and the deadly membrane and the purplish poison were gone! Gone, all but the getting well, which went slowly and at times discouragingly. Doctor Bryson had warned all that patience would be needed in the getting well. Ruth did not get back, even with summer and sunshine, her color and her strength. Doctor Bryson said she must have different air.

"If you could get away somewhere with her," he said in perplexity one night at the table. "Up north somewhere; anywhere. She ought to be taken away before the hot weather."

"If I could only get away," reflected Mrs. Eliot. "But my pupils! They would be scattered to the four winds if I went away now. Later I could manage—but now, I don't see how."

"She needs to be somewhere up north on the water. Sunshine and sand are what she needs all summer long. Medicine is of no avail in a case like this. She would come back in the fall better than she ever was in her life. The virus of diphtheria is peculiarly malignant; she was pretty sick."

"I'll tell you what," exclaimed Mrs. Goddard, who was in the circle, "let her go up to Grand Bay with us, Mrs. Eliot. I'll take her and keep her all summer."

"Sure," chimed in Mr. Goddard, "you can go fishing with me, Ruth, and swimming every morning. Let her go with us, Mrs. Eliot. We're going to start Monday."

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It seemed sudden, but it seemed the thing to do. There was a good bit of sewing necessary. Mrs. Eliot hesitated; everyone urged her to a decision and one night's reflection settled her doubt. In the morning preparation began for starting Ruth with the Goddards. After one week and a sewing and an excitement in the Eliot rooms unparalleled, Ruth, like a fairy girl, stood one afternoon between Mr. and Mrs. Goddard on the deck of the northbound steamer, waving at her mother and June and Jim a wondrous parasol that June had surreptitiously conveyed, only the night before, into her outfit.

The child left more than an ordinary vacancy at June's table. It was several days before the new adjustment became endurable to her mother. Then a letter from Mrs. Goddard, with incredible details concerning Ruth's appetite helped restore Mrs. Eliot's spirits. Bowles, too, astounded the household by marrying, without the slightest notice, a pretty country girl up at Waukegan, and taking a flat in a big new apartment building out south. Following that, most unexpectedly, Mary Montague came back from London with exciting stories of new successes and new sensations in the world of miniatures. The weather turned intensely hot. Temperature became the topic and the nights were spent in extraordinary efforts to keep cool.

The whole South Side made an effort to get out of doors the minute the sun set. It became a campaign of rides and breezes and ices. Every night after dinner the doctor's horses were at the door. He drove with John a great deal in the phaeton; sometimes they

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ordered a stable cabriolet and took Miss Montague, Mrs. Eliot and June through the parks, which hummed from dark until midnight with carriages. Sometimes they drove, four, through Lincoln Park and spent the evening in one of the palm gardens where the music was excellent, the refreshments good, and the air cool. The tables were filled with people, relaxed, indolent, resting, and the shaded corners swarmed with parties at supper, parties at ices, and parties at steins and cigars. Men with slightly foreign airs, hair pompadour; men long haired and crop haired and men with no hair; women smartly rigged, and under the arc lights difficult to place as they laughed and sipped and ate and listened. What amazed the party from June's was not alone the apparent refinement and elegance of the women, but their apparent indifference to the number of times their glasses were replenished.

If it was moonlight, so much the better. The doctor would take the reins—he was a whip—with Mrs. Eliot at his side, while John and Miss Montague rode behind, and over the good pavement they would briskly whirl, and through the bad streets they would slowly and pleasantly lurch, with the moon breaking between brick rows and from behind flat buildings, and the horses eyeing the rotten roadway disdainfully, picking aristocratic steps along it. The holes would lie black in the shadows, with Doctor Bryson watching the careful pace as a sailor watches the water, the uneven springing dip of the carriage punctuating snatches of talk or laugh or joke from the back seat to the front, or from the front to the back. And home late to a big pitcher of lemonade left in the refrigerator

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by old Julie, the cook, as a personal compliment to her friend, Doctor Bryson.

Sometimes they would vary such diversions with a roof garden evening; but the result was always the same. Throughout the warm weather, like real Chicagoans, they worked hard all night getting ready for the next day's heat; then they wondered after a while why they were tired—at least so Bryson suggested one night when there were complaints at dinner of fatigue.

"The real philosophy for hot weather," he declared, "is to take off your clothes and go to bed. But I'm the only one in town that knows that—"

"And you haven't sense enough to do it," suggested Miss Montague from a fork full of peas.

"True, but then I'm never tired."

He was, in fact, indefatigable; always ready for any sort of an excursion, nor was any excursion too extended for him. Hot weather, sun, rain, iced drinks, music, night air, everything agreed with him. One night when he wanted to go north it happened that Miss Montague had something to go to at the Fine Arts Building; John was booked with her and it broke up the party. Mrs. Eliot and June were sitting on the porch with Bryson moving about, restless.

"Let's go down and call on Bowles and his wife," he suggested to Mrs. Eliot after a while.

"You go down," she said. He would not.

"We've been talking about it for a month," he persisted. "Let's go down to-night."

"I should have to dress."

"Oh, no."

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"I couldn't call on a bride in this costume."

"Well, go ahead, I'll wait for you."

"Go on," urged June, "and wear your new dress."

"What's the new dress?" asked Bryson.

"Why, the organdie," scolded June

"The only one I have," laughed Mrs. Eliot.

"She made it herself, every stitch, and she hasn't had it on yet. Now's your chance. Come on, I'll help you."

After that there was no hiding of the organdie secret. The demand became peremptory. June urged her upstairs, lighted the gas and got out the dress.

The dress! The new gown of one whole year. Product of a little money, of little economies, innumerable little stitches, hours stolen from rest and from sleep and plannings prodigious—simple little organdie. Half an hour, at least, Bryson put in about the halls and parlor; then June brought her down with a cry, "Now, Mr. Man!"

"Jove, it's a dream," exclaimed Bryson, rising from the piano stool. She stood playful under the chandelier, one hand clasping her girdle, the other falling from an outstretched arm. She looked so slight and so girlish, her face lighted so happily over the success, her cheeks flushed so prettily at the surprised praise of her critics, that they fell doubly in love—with the organdie and the wearer. Yielding to the quick impulse of their admiration, she twirled half about like a dancing girl. June clapped her hands at her with a shout and ran at her, but she caught up her skirt, escaped, and with a bow of running nods, made away for her hat.

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"What makes it rustle so?" asked Bryson, as the two followed her into the hall.

"That's the petticoat, you goose," exclaimed June. "It's made over silk; that's the finery of it, don't you see?"

They started down the avenue in good mood. He wanted to ride, but she wanted to walk. As they went on there was a pleasure even in the fall of their feet together, and her hand light upon his arm was confidence and inspiration to him. The Bowleses were at home; they were rebelliously warm and happy. It took only ten minutes of visiting between the men to evolve a plan. A new South Side garden, over which Bowles was enthusiastic, had been recently opened. "Haven't you?" exclaimed the Bowleses in chorus. "Then, Sammie," cried Mrs. Bowles, a whole feminine dynamo in herself, "we must take them right down there on the trolley!" So the call turned into a trolley ride and an evening at the new garden under the chap-eronage of the Bowleses.

But whatever Sammie Bowles's faults, failure to provide entertainment was not one. The appointments of the new place were liberal, and it was crowded. Bowles, however, was close enough to the new manager to get a table surrounded by huge, new painted green tubs bursting with perpetuated palms, where they could command the dancing and the vaudeville "features" that crowded one upon another on and off the stage. Bowles assumed absolute command and controlled the ordering. Mrs. Eliot was served with pretty ices and wonderful lemonades, and Mrs. Bowles with a variety of frappéd punches and fruited

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creams : Doctor Bryson with steins of very black beer and Bowles himself with delicately glassed amber beverages, topped with lovely strawberries, which Bryson declared had fallen into bad company. The people that crowded the garden, seen through wreathing cigar smoke and nodding plumes, through desiccated fronds and spitting arc lights, were in a contagious good humor. At eleven o'clock the party left the resort and took the trolley car as far as the Bowles apartments, where they parted, the Doctor and Mrs. Eliot deciding to walk home.

The later hours of the night had brought but partial relief from the heat. They sauntered easily, talking in starts as they went along. He asked her what she thought of Mrs. Bowles. "She's a good-hearted little thing. All nerves, of course. And very pretty, isn't she?"

"Yes, she is pretty; but Lord!" he drew himself languidly together with the frank conviction naturally his, "if anybody had been called to pick the bride in our party you'd have been chosen fifty times over. You never looked so pretty in your life as you did at the table to-night. Mrs. Bowles was a shade jealous."

"Nonsense."

"Did you honestly make this yourself?" looking at the organdie under a street lamp.

"Yes."

"It's the loveliest thing I ever saw."

"Then if my nerves give out at music, as you say they will, I'll take up dressmaking. I'll start a big establishment on Michigan Avenue and adopt a plate and a crest. Who knows? By that time, perhaps,

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you'll give me orders for your wife's gowns; she'll be very swell, of course."

"She is very swell now," he answered, calmly looking down, "and you can have the ordering of all her dresses—will you take the contract now?"

"For future delivery? It's a good way ahead; don't let's settle it to-night—let's talk about Mrs. Bowles."

"All right. Do you see that star up there? That soft, white, burning one; steady and dazzling. That's you; and there's Mrs. Bowles over there; that blinking affair to the right."

"Let's not talk about Mrs. Bowles then. Let's talk about the poor people that came to you to-day in distress and that you sent away happy."

"Let distress be for the day; to-night let us dream that there is no distress; that troubles hide when the stars seek. The day may be to another; the night is ours."

She made no answer.

"Why are you silent?"

"Listening to the echo of your words."

It was still in the street; their feet fell in slow rhythm together and the silken rustle of her skirt was as if they tread among the leaves of woods. The walk home was all too short and the house seemed stifling after the night air. The windows and doors hardly counted, though every one, to tempt a breeze, was thrown wide. They parted at the head of the stairs. He wanted her to go down again and sit on the porch. He clung to her hand, but she pulled it away, and, telling him he must go to bed, went to her room.

He did not go to bed. He went to his room, threw

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off his coat and waistcoat and tore open his collar; it seemed to oppress him. He dragged the couch to the window and lay down with his hands clasped above his head, looking out for a while at the stars. In a few minutes he was up again hunting for a fan; then he walked irresolutely into the hall, downstairs, back to the basement stairs and through the dining-room, which was dark, into the kitchen, where the gas burned low. His friend, cook Julie, was a night hawk. On muggy nights, owing to her asthma, she never went to bed. Bryson found her just outside the kitchen door dozing in her armchair.

"Julie," said he, "did you ever see such a hot night in your life?"

"Oh, doctor, is it you? Ain't it awful to-day?" gasped Julie. "What be you wantin', doctor?"

"Julie," said the doctor, confidentially, slipping a dollar into her hand, "do you want to make me a lemonade? One of those Pittsburg lemonades, Julie?"

"Oh, doctor!"

"Will you?"

"Sure, for you, doctor, yes; if I don't drop dead over it."

"Is there any claret in the ice box?"

"Plenty."

"Make a pitcher of it, Julie. I never was so thirsty in my life."

He lighted the gas in the dining-room, picked a newspaper from the sideboard and sat down while the lemonade was going forward to look it over. But he threw the paper down almost at once, took a handkerchief from his shirt pocket, passed it impatiently

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across his forehead, and throwing one foot across his knee, clasped his hands over his head, leaned back and studied the ceiling.

"Put the claret in to suit yourself, doctor," suggested Julie, coming forward, with her mellow wheeze.

He started, and the front legs of his chair struck the floor as he laughed. He took the bottle, emptied half of it into the lemon juice, and Julie wheezed and stirred and sugared until he pronounced it right. "Julie," he declared, admiringly, "you're a marvel."

"Ah, doctor! Did you want one glass or two?" she asked, spreading a napkin on a tray.

"One."

"You're not going to drink all this alone?"

"What?"

"Did you want just one glass?"

"Why, two, thank you; that's fine. Good night."

When he left the dining-room his manner changed. His restlessness became repression and he tread so lightly that the chipped ice slushing faintly in the pitcher as he walked upstairs was the only sound to be heard.

The gas burned dim in the upper hall. He put the tray noiselessly on the table at the head of the stairs, took up a glass and, holding it to the lip of the pitcher, filled it with only the slightest clinking, filled the second glass more slowly and set the pitcher down. He took the glasses up in either hand, set them again on the table, took his handkerchief from the pocket of his shirt, passed it over his mouth, took up the two glasses and started toward Mrs. Eliot's room.

The door of her sitting-room stood slightly open.

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He pushed it slowly open with his foot. The room was dark save for the light from the hall that made things dimly visible. He spoke her name, "Helen?" and listened. The portières across the door opening into the bedroom were half drawn; the only light within came through the transom of the hall door. Balancing his two glasses, he walked toward the bedroom. If it required an effort to steady the full glasses none was perceptible, even to himself, and speaking in the same low tone he had called before, he murmured, "I've brought you some lemonade."

There were two beds in the inner room. Her own stood to the right of the opening partly in shadow; just as with the words he took a step forward and stood in the doorway he saw her. She was on her knees beside her bed, her face hidden in her hands. The coverlet was turned back; she was saying her prayers. Of all situations he had foreseen this was the unexpected. It struck him like a cold plunge, horribly out of keeping with his temper. He had an instant's vision of her loosened hair, of her bent head and the slope of her rounding shoulders as she knelt, then her face rose out of her hands. She looked up in astonishment, in consternation, and was on her feet and before him like a flash. All he could see was the white outline, the loose hair and the startled eyes.

"What is the matter, doctor?"

"Nothing, only I brought you a glass of lemonade."

She looked all her surprise, her unspoken question, her swift comprehension, in the bare interval before she spoke. Then she said evenly and kindly, "I sincerely beg your pardon; I did not hear you rap."

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"I didn't rap." There was no defiance in the way he said it, only an inevitable one in the words themselves that she could ignore only by silence; but on the threshold of honor silence is defense.

"I had both hands full," he muttered, "how could I rap? I called, but you didn't hear, probably."

She caught at the straw. "Oh, did you? I am so sorry I didn't hear." Speaking, she slipped directly past him into the sitting-room, seized a match from the mantel, struck it, and, reached quickly to the fixture to light the gas. As she made the effort the flowing sleeve of her nighrobe fell from her arm and the blaze of the match left it lighted in defenseless loveliness; but what was it to him now—a burglar in Paradise? Just a slight revenge came to him—her match went out and they were left again in the half darkness.

"I'm glad of it," he said, resentfully. "What do you want to light the gas for?"

"You light it, please, doctor; let me take the glasses."

"Nonsense, I won't do it; you don't need any light. Here, take your lemonade."

"What is it, claret punch, doctor?" she asked instinctively. "I drank two glasses of lemonade at the garden; thank you very much. I'm not a bit thirsty. I won't take any."

"I suppose you'll sit down while I take mine?"

"Don't drink it," she urged, laying her hands on his wrists, "you are burning hot now."

"Well, am I to stand here all night holding this stuff?"

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"No, no, give it to me," she exclaimed, taking the brimming glasses from him. They stood facing each other.

"Now you look as foolish as I looked. Aren't you going to sit down?"

"Let me run and slip on a kimono," she pleaded. "I'm just in my sleeping gown," she said, like one ashamed. "I won't be a minute."

"No, I'm going, anyway."

"But don't go angry. Sit there by the window a moment till I can partly dress."

"No."

"You shall not leave me angry. Sit down. I will be with you in an instant."

"Put down the claret then and sit down yourself. If you're afraid of me as you are, go to bed."

"Don't be harsh with me. I will sit down." She stepped quickly to the mantel and set the tumblers upon it. He went to the chair at the window. As he sat down she glided past the hall door that he had closed behind him, drew it wide open and walking over sat down at his side, in the window seat, with a determined effort at ease; but the woman shamed could not be banished from her attitude, and it annoyed him; the more because he knew he was the cause of her humiliation.

"What have you opened the door for?" he asked shortly.

"It makes such a good breeze with the door open; don't you feel it?"

"And everybody can see us from the hall?"

"Nobody is up now."

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"If just one person passes there," he pointed deliberately with his finger, "you are disgraced."

"Not in your eyes."

"Will you disgrace yourself for me, and yet not get a divorce and marry me?"

"Do I disgrace myself by sitting here as you bid me? You are not ashamed of me, are you?"

He sulked.

"Answer me," she insisted.

"No."

"I only want you to sit here for a minute till you can think," she urged. "I tell you, you must not leave me in anger. You must not go to sleep, angry at me. I tell you I would crawl on my knees through the hall after you, into your room after you, but you should tell me you are not angry with me."

"Well, by heaven, I'm not going to sit here with that door open," he muttered between his teeth. "If you don't care anything for yourself, I care something for you." Her heart bounded; she knew she was safe.

"Close it if you like," she said, indifferently. He did sulkily close the door, leaving it, as he had first found it, a few inches ajar. When he came back and sat down she slipped off her seat in the window.

"I am not so afraid of the appearance of disgrace," she said, kneeling at his chair, "as disgrace itself." She spoke low and fast. "I could stand a great deal of the appearance of it for you." She caught his hand feverishly. "I could bear disgrace for you. I could wear a scarlet letter for you. I could wear it,

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yes, I could—for your child, doctor. But when I think of what it would mean to this other child for me to wear it, my unhappy little girl, whose life you have saved to be a woman—born in my wretched wedlock. When I think of a scarlet letter and her—” His hand fell from hers and she hid her face.

“Oh, hang it! Don’t talk any more about that.”

She stopped and took his hand again. “What were you doing?” he asked abruptly.

“When?”

“When I came in.”

“Saying my prayers.”

“I never saw anybody pray like that. I thought women prayed with their eyes lifted beautifully up,” he said harshly.

“I’m ashamed to lift mine up.”

“What have you to be ashamed of?”

“More than I may tell to you.”

“I interrupted you.”

“Yes.”

“You’d better go back and finish.”

“May I finish here?”

Before he could answer or protest or in any way avoid it she sunk at his side, her elbows resting on his knee, her face again in her hands. He shifted uneasily again and again, all save the knee her elbow rested on, but she did not release it. He felt shamefaced with anger. The night wind puffed softly in from the yard, but it was very still outside. When at last she uncovered her face she took up his hand and kissed it.

“You’re crying,” he whispered, staggered in an in-

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stant by a new feeling. She would not speak. "I hope your prayers will be answered," he added, after a moment, haltingly. "I'm going." She followed him to the door and into the hall. "You mustn't stand here," he exclaimed, looking surprised and alarmed at her. "What is it? What's the matter, Helen; are you insane? Go back into your room," he whispered, pushing her uplifted hands.

"No—here. Do you forgive me?" she asked, clinging to him.

"For what?"

"You know what. You know I can't explain. Do you forgive me, I say?" she cried under her breath, catching at his sleeve.

"I love you, you know that—and I'm just a man like other men, you know that—now, don't you?"

"You're a million times bigger, braver, more generous than other men."

"Go into your room."

"No."

"Yes." He urged her back. She would not be put away. Looking straight into his eyes, she hesitated; then with all her courage said, "Kiss me."

He stooped half blinded. "Tell me you forgive me," she faltered. His lips touched her forehead.

"I do—you give me all you can—"

"And that is nothing—"

"Better nothing from you than all from another," he murmured unsteadily. "Do you forgive me?"

"You were forgiven before you touched my door, forgiven in the thought of it, a thousand, thousand times. Good night!"

They turned and took the parted ways.

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. ELIOT made hardly an attempt at her breakfast. It was Saturday, her free day. Appearing after the men had gone down town, she sipped her coffee and talked with June of the intense heat. Miss Montague did not come down to breakfast, and Mrs. Eliot, going to her room, found her indisposed.

Mary Montague was not at any time large. Petite would describe her, but in bed she looked fairly infantile. Her hair among the pillows was very dark and her brown eyes, set not quite regularly, eyes that spoke of wistfulness and work rather than of even outline—of deep beauty rather than shallow—set in the thinness of her French face, looked darker and heavier than they really were.

"What is it, Mary, are you sick, child? or is it the heat?" asked Mrs. Eliot, drawing the window shade.

"It must be the heat, I suppose. But I haven't been really well ever since I came back this time. I'm just being miserable this morning all by my lonesome."

"Have you had something to eat?"

"Oh, Nannie brought me some fruit and chocolate. And, oh, my pill; I forgot my pill. When I was in Paris this spring I had to take pills. The doctor said my blood was impoverished, and when I got back here and began to run down again, you know Doctor Bryson prescribed for me and, wasn't it queer? he gave me the very same pills my Paris doctor did. They are made in Paris. When I told Doctor Bryson about it

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he was quite pleased. He thinks so highly of the Paris doctors. Have you had your breakfast? Then sit down, do, and talk a while. Oh, I am as lonesome this morning as—and one oughtn't to be now—in summer—with birds and trees and grass. I'm going to run away somewhere into the country pretty soon."

"But where is your pill, Mary? Take your medicine first."

"Oh, yes. In the upper left-hand drawer in a little bottle with a green label; the upper drawers of the *escritoire*, dear; right there—"

The two tiny drawers opened side by side. Mrs. Eliot, by mistake, opened the right-hand drawer. It was empty save for a miniature which lay exposed to the eye, a portrait of Doctor Bryson. She closed the drawer with a start. The picture surprised her at first, then she felt faint; so faint she could hardly open the second drawer, and when it was open she could see nothing in it, but had to feel with her hand for the bottle of pills. A totally new sensation overwhelmed her. Her conclusions grew like mushrooms and weighed like stones on her heart. Mary Montague, too, loved him; Mrs. Eliot felt it and knew it, and before she reached the side of the little artist to give her the innocent pill, jealous rage was churning in her heart. Fortunately, Nannie came in at that moment with letters. Mary ran them over and cried, "Here's one that looks like wedding cards."

She opened that envelope first. "Yes, cards, Mrs. Eliot! Look there." It was the announcement of the marriage of Mrs. Nellie Westover Ledgcott to Doctor Samuel Reynolds Kurd.

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"She's got him, hasn't she?" exclaimed Mary, childlike and lovely. "No matter. I'll take the pill if it's only Kurd. If it were Doctor Bryson I'd scratch her eyes out," she added, frankly.

The room had become stifling to Mrs. Eliot. She said she must write some letters and made her escape. But from what she had seen and from what she now knew she could not escape.

The same cards came for all those of the old table on Wabash Avenue. They were sitting down at dinner that evening when Doctor Bryson opened his envelope. He read the full names of the contracting parties aloud and with a mild deliberation to John Allison, and made but a single comment. "Nellie Westover Ledgcott. It would be better legal form if it were Nellie Leftover Wedgcott, wouldn't it, John?" he asked, lazily. Then he began telling humorous stories about Kurd, and forgetting Kurd, told others till he gradually brought the whole table into good humor with him; for that gift he had, that he could make troubles look far off and slight and the passing life good and near.

While they were eating, Nannie answered the door-bell twice. A little while after they had gone upstairs from the dining-room Mrs. Eliot heard the doctor's light double tap on her door. He held out an armful of La France roses.

"Aren't they pretty?" he asked, without looking her in the eye.

"Oh, beautiful!"

"I got them for Miss Montague. Nannie told me this morning she was not very well and I thought these would please her."

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The natural thought that came into her mind as he held them out had been that they were for her; homage had made her so far selfish. When he said his roses were for Mary Montague she was conscious again of that sudden pang. "Take them right up to her," she smiled, sinking inwardly at the strange, hateful instinct. "She has been miserable all day. Take them right up."

"You come up, too." She struggled with a guilty joy at that tone from him, but beside it rose a new resolve that the bitter day had made firm: that he should have a chance to love little Mary if he would; a chance if he would, she had said to herself in the agony of her heart a score of times. "No," she answered, "you take them yourself; it will be the prettier compliment. She is upstairs now."

Mary met him prettily as all grace. "Isn't it good to have friends?" she cried, bounding across the room for a bowl and water. "This morning, oh, I was so wretched; and now you and Mr. Allison have both remembered me with flowers. See, he sent these blossoms; are they not delicious? And now I have a bowl of La France roses! Beautiful! Life is so good when it is good, isn't it? Sit a few minutes over there by the window—do. The air sweeps through from the bedroom. This is the chair you like."

She is like a humming bird, he thought, as he watched and listened—exquisite, miraculous—yet one does not love a sprite; one loves a woman, he said to himself. The whole case called up, tried, decided in a second—man's verdict on woman is so quick.

Downstairs, while Bryson was chatting with Miss Montague, Mrs. Eliot was sitting on the porch. She

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sat alone, waiting for him to come down and tell her what had happened during the day. She had insensibly come to look for this, and his stay above and the heat made her restless. She rose presently and went upstairs, holding her lawn skirt between her thumb and finger like a cobweb. She closed the door of her room, turned on the gas at the dresser, and looking into the mirror dried her upper lip and her nose with her handkerchief, for the heat was oppressive and her skin moist. She opened a powder box, and dipping a corner of the handkerchief into it, touched her face here and there. Her hair began to worry her. It would not behave in the humid atmosphere, and for a time she fussed petulantly with stray locks that would neither stay in curl nor in place—and thought suddenly of Mrs. Ledgcott's wedding cards and of her wedding. She wondered whether Doctor Bryson had come downstairs, and picked out the ruffles of her waist as a bird plumes its breast after a bath. Then she turned down the gas and walked in a stately daintiness down the stairs, out on the porch. Doctor Bryson had not come down.

She seated herself. Something of intense impulse throbbed in her mood. She fell at once to wondering whether he had come down. Possibly, she said, he had gone out or he had ordered the team and was going to drive. Would he ask her to drive? She agreed with herself that she would plead a headache. Perhaps he would ask Miss Montague to go; at the thought she felt the extreme heat and fanned herself uneasily.

From above came laughter. She fancied she recognized Mary's and his. It was too sultry on the porch.

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Mrs. Eliot went upstairs to her room. After she had closed the door she walked mechanically to the dresser, turned on the gas and looked into the glass. Her hair continued to annoy her. Again and again she put it back of her ears and patted it about her neck; patted her lips again with her handkerchief and studied her face a moment to see whether she was "breaking" under the eyes. He had told her once how to tell a woman that had passed thirty-five. She was afraid she would "break" long before that. She turned the gas low again and sat down by the open window.

Back rooms, after all, were not nearly so comfortable as front rooms, and her own, she knew, were nothing like as attractive as Mary's, who spent a little fortune on her belongings. The back rooms were cheaper, yet they cost all Mrs. Eliot could afford, and she wished she were able to earn as much money as Mary earned with her miniatures, and her mind ran to that miniature in the escritoire drawer. Mary loved him.

There was no air in the room. She rose oppressed and softly opened the hall door—enough to catch the slight breeze from the stairway—thinking as she did so that it had been so opened for the air with the ottoman placed so against it the night before when he had come in with the claret. And she felt thirst now and she would have drunk claret had it been near, for her breath wanted to come quicker than she would let it, and her struggle with the thought of his love for her was pleasant. She felt her heart beat and her blood run warm and languid, and she liked the dimness and the night; but Ruth? She wondered what Ruth might be doing. Then, like a borealis, her mind's train

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shifted to last night, and she felt he must be angry. She knew he must be angry, for he had never before spent a whole evening in the house away from her. A bell tolling in the distance caught her ear and suggested how late it had grown. What if she had met him differently? But the heat when she thought of last night made her faint and she put her mind on a new pupil, a girl, a beautiful girl, who had come to her on Friday to take lessons for the summer, and she wished she were as stately as that girl, and listened for a step on the stairs coming down—for a double tap on her door. He always tapped twice in precisely the same way. She listened for it till the silence grew insupportable. And, of a sudden, while her tortured thoughts wandered, the tap came.

Her heart whirled like a burglar alarm, but her voice fell soft as dew. "Come." As Doctor Bryson pushed open the door she rose with a delicate surprise. "Oh, pardon me, doctor," said she, insincerely, turning up the light and advancing, "I thought it was June—" He held a basket.

"I've brought you some flowers."

"Me?" she exclaimed, taking the offering hungrily. "What are they?" She lifted one of the leaves that topped the basket. "Lilies of the valley!" She raised them and half buried her face in their fragrance. "Lilies of the valley," then looking up at him as she raised her face, "oh, but I love them," she said, fervently. "I love them." He made no comment. "Does that thank you?" she murmured in low confidence. He was silent, only smiling slightly.

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"Why are you so good to me, doctor? They are all in moss!"

"Because I love you."

She knew it was her fault, but with the faintness of the lilies in her heart, she let the words sink like wine into her senses. The torture she felt while he had been with the woman who she thought loved him flushed into the hungry joy of possession.

"I hunted all over town for these," he added, as she contented herself with merely raising the frail basket to hide her eyes from his. "You can guess why, can't you?" She inhaled the lilies' odor. "To plead for my forgiveness."

He could not know she did not want to hear just that. He could not know that her heart beat wild, defiant, reckless now. If he had noticed her breathing he would have thought it painful recollection, not sudden rebellion, that stirred her. Had the light shone at that moment on her eyes he would have seen in their expression what he never had seen before; but her eyes were in shadow.

"Come on downstairs," he suggested, lightly. "It's cooler on the porch," and then, half laughing, "fasten some lilies at your throat for protection against the—night air."

"Isn't it too late to go down?" she murmured, raising a doubt that asked to be laid.

"Late? Why, it's only eight o'clock." She stifled an exclamation.

"Eight o'clock? Surely it's long after ten," she cried, stepping hurriedly to the table to pin the lilies.

"It's just eleven minutes past eight," declared the

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doctor, holding up his watch. She bent in low laughter.

"What's the matter with you to-night?"

"Oh, nothing," she rippled, laughing the last word.

"Come, where do you want to sit? On the porch? Stay a moment," she added, "you must wear some of these. Here."

She ran back to the table, took a spray of the lilies from the basket and hurriedly, like a child, fastened them to his coat, bubbling all the while with quick words and suppressed bursts of mirth. "How could I have made such a mistake about the time?"

"You've been napping."

"Nonsense. Asleep?" She raised her eyes with an inconceivable drollness. "Anything else?"

"Well, are you going downstairs?"

"I'm going wherever you want me to. Lead the way, please?" They walked down as if they owned the city. At the vestibule he held open the screen like a knight and she glided through like a princess. He took a hickory chair; she drew a rocker close beside him so she could rest the toes of her slippers on the side rung of his chair.

"Now," she said, in a low voice, leaning well forward, "tell me everything that has happened to-day—everything."

Bryson leaned back as if he found himself comfortable for the first moment in a long, hot day. "I congratulated Kurd," he said, wryly.

"Oh, I hate him. Don't talk about him."

"I fancy I hate her, don't I?"

"How should I know?"

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"You know me better—and worse—than anybody else."

"I hope never to prove unworthy of your precious confidence," she whispered. "Now go on; tell me something else. Anything; trouble, failure, success, pleasure, anything so it is yours. If it isn't yours, don't tell it. Did you operate to-day? Are you very, very tired to-night? Shall I make you some lemonade?"

"No." He spoke with so dry a significance that she laughed. Then with little quips and sudden playfulness and arch clawing, as a kitten touches up a musing cat, she coaxed and woke him up. With confidence again between them Bryson inclined to remorse. She uttered no words, but there are moods stronger than words, and it was her mood to resent compunction. She would have none.

After a while, mystified by her unusual liveliness, he wanted to drive. That she would not; she had the reins anyway. By ten o'clock he was determined to walk. To this she consented and strolled bareheaded up and down the block with him; then over to the boulevard, clinging to his arm and making him tell her just what Mary had to say, and listening between words for every inflection he used when he answered. In passing a delicatessen store he balked, and insisted on buying some ice cream. She let him, talking while he was being served with the chubby German woman that sat at the cash register and wore her yellow hair braided at an alarming tension. The doctor came forward presently with two paper bucketfuls of cream, and heedless of her ridicule, carried them all the way to June's porch. Joking and chaffing together they groped down

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to the dark dining-room for dishes and spoons, and sitting together long after the street grew quiet they gradually ate, to the very last, the two bucketfuls of cream, and laughed at each other. She poured a stream of sprightly gayety into her quick talk; she spoke and laughed and looked abandon. It was moist and hot in her hands and relaxed in her neck, and it flashed in her eyes as she looked languidly into his. But when very late she wanted at last to retire he insisted he was just waking up and would not have it. She began to wonder how she could get away: now feeling she ought to and must; now careless of consequences and listening to tones that lulled her like poppy at his side. A north wind came to her aid. A chill swept over the porch and helped her, feverish and excited, to get away from his clinging hands and up to her room. It was not till she closed the door with a laugh on her lips at his parting pantomime, turned on the light, looked in the glass, saw the reckless beauty reflected there that she started, frightened, at what she had done since she left her room four hours earlier, and she turned from her face as from a sudden wickedness.

She sat down on the side of her bed overcome with horror at the way she had acted, for the first time in her life, that evening. She saw, alarmed, for the first time new possibilities in her nature. Tossed by contrary eddies, now one way, now another, she seemed after thinking herself safe to wake on the edge of the whirlpool. What most frightened her was that it no longer looked black and awful. Drowning? It is only the struggle that costs; what is it, after all, if one gives up? It made her giddy and sick to think. She

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tore the gossamer lawn impatiently from her shoulders; the very ruffles of her nightrobe looked hateful. She took down her hair with her conscience burning. She opened a drawer for a hair ribbon and caught up in her fingers one of Ruth's. She hesitated, put it aside and took another; then as she put out the light she threw herself face downward on her child's bed and burst into flooding tears. It was not that she was sorry; she was not. She was rebellious, and knew it. Exhausted at last with torment she felt the chill of the wind on her shoulders. She knew she ought to go to bed, but lay a long time without the resolution to do so. To go to bed meant to say a prayer, and that she could not bring herself to. There was no prayer in her heart, only rebellion and despair. Her love for him, the love she had never before fully acknowledged to herself, swayed her like a tempest, and in the midst of it tossed Ruth. Waking, sleeping, sick, well or dying, the child would not leave her thoughts, and always in the gloom stood the man she loved—waiting.

She tried to think that divorce must be right. To think of what he suffered, loving her barred from him; and of what he had done for Ruth; and that she herself was the victim of insane scruples. But always she ended in the smothered horror of an atmosphere that she hated with every pure instinct. She tried to class herself with divorced women, and boarding-house women and hotel women, whose very proximity she detested, and saw her daughter growing up with a spot on her mother's name. Paint it as she would, that would not stay covered. To what purpose a devoted husband, such as she knew she could make of this

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strong man that loved her, if she were not in the highest worthy of devotion? Of what use a pure home, such as she knew she could make for him, with a taint in her own heart? If one divorce, why not another? Why should he not one day cast her off, as she wanted now to cast off this weakling fettered to herself? Mrs. Ledgcott rose before her in all her detestableness—running after a new husband while her boy lay dying in a boarding house. Ledgcott himself was not so heartless, for had he not come and wept over his dead child and begged Mrs. Ledgcott to come to Johnnie's side as the boy lay dead and speak to him? Had not she, Mrs. Eliot herself, taken the pleading from the poor devil to hear it scoffed at by his divorced wife? And now with her boy dead this woman had married another man, who was cruel, avaricious and mean, because he had money and she wanted money.

She rose and went to the window. The night air was cold, the tower clocks were striking, her head throbbing. She could not count whether it was two or three. She looked out on the stars and Ruth came back to her as she had knelt at night by the window and pointed to them. Tears of another kind welled into her eyes. She thought of last night and of that fearful, fearful coming; that silent, terrible coming; of what might have been if he had not found her as he did find her; of what might have happened if the roses had gone last night to Mary Montague instead of this night. And she staggered toward her bed and sank writhing on her knees—moaning for pity of her weakness; begging that her burden be not made heavier than she could bear.

CHAPTER XVII

THE sun of the next morning rose on a very quiet household at Miss June's. It was Sunday and shades were carefully drawn to shut out the prettiest part of the day. The big bowl of roses in Mary Montague's room lay in gloom till nine o'clock; at that hour Mrs. Eliot raised the curtain, and while talking lightly to Mary, propped among the pillows, touched with her quick fingers the roses and they took unto themselves new life. She was freshening them with the sole thought of loving them, because they were his, and he had given them to Mary. She was determined this morning that if he could love Mary he should, and she thought, simple, that the best way to bring this about was to love her herself. Nearly all the morning she spent up in Mary's room, and when the little artist appeared in the studio in cool blues and arranged herself in a couch corner, where she could look from over a marvelous bar of white mull at the situation, Mrs. Eliot summoned John and the doctor, and leaving the three together went downstairs to write, she said, a letter.

Everyone was down for dinner and everyone apparently cheerful. But after dinner until evening Mrs. Eliot kept her room with the plea of headache, which Bryson tried unavailingly to break up with advice and inquiries and prescriptions, to all of which Mrs. Eliot was provokingly unresponsive. When he insisted that

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nothing would do her head so much good as a drive in the park, she thought Miss Montague needed the air more than she did. Thereupon he took Miss Montague to drive. When he returned and inquired about the headache, and again recommended fresh air, Mrs. Eliot asked why he didn't take John out. He took John out. Later he suggested that the sun was just low enough to make the evening perfect and invited Mrs. Eliot to take a turn behind the horses, at least as far as the Midway. It was then that she suggested giving Miss June an airing, and Doctor Bryson took Miss June in sepulchral finery up and down Drexel Boulevard. When he brought June in and the horses champed again at the curb he knocked once more at Mrs. Eliot's door.

"I understand," said he thoughtfully, "the maid is out. It's her day off. There is no one else about the house now except you and the cook. If you think best," he added, calmly, "I'll take Julie next; then, possibly, if I come back you'll go yourself."

"Are not the horses tired, doctor?" she smiled appealingly.

"It is a fresh team. Come now, do. I wouldn't urge you if I didn't know it would do more to quiet your nerves than anything else in the world." She put on her hat. When they had driven a block he discovered she had no wrap. Nothing would do but that they must drive back and he ran in and up to her room after it.

They drove leisurely to the Midway and walked the horses through Jackson Park. Turning north from the caravels the evening air blew cool off the lake.

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"Now is the time for your jacket," said he, holding the reins in one hand while he held the coat in the other. "This is the moment I brought it for."

She knew she ought to thank him, but she did so faintly. "If that air doesn't help your headache there's no virtue in ozone. What have you been doing, writing letters all day?"

"I wrote two."

"To whom?"

"Mrs. Goddard and Ruth."

"There's nothing like that northern air. This is a taste of it you get right now. Do you feel that? It will be the making of Ruth."

"I wrote Mrs. Goddard to send her down Thursday when Mr. Goddard comes."

"What?"

"I wrote Mrs. Goddard to send Ruth down."

"What on earth did you do that for?" he asked in astonishment. "That's the worst thing possible to do. Bring her back in all this heat—before she's—what did you do it for?"

"Perhaps I was selfish. I hope not. I am so lonely without her—"

He made no reply.

All day she had dreaded the telling, and not without reason. He said nothing; but his anger grew like a cloud and she could feel it as distinctly as she could see the German Building, brilliant and noisy on the left.

"Doesn't this remind you of the World's Fair?" she asked tentatively.

"Yes."

"Will they ever be able to do anything to preserve

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that building?" she inquired as he swung the horses at a higher speed around and past the Field Museum.

"No."

Twice again she made an effort to talk, but he unbent no further. When she thanked him with all the gentleness at the curb, as he handed her from the spider, he only lifted his hat—in his derby and loose driving gloves and his long light driving coat he was certainly handsome—and bowing, he spoke to the horses and drove up the street.

For two people unused to concealing their feelings they kept their secret for a few days very well. But by Thursday even June perceived that a cloud had settled on the gallant doctor. Nor did Ruth come by the Thursday boat. Mrs. Goddard wrote that her husband would not come down until the heat moderated.

After the first strain of the situation on Mrs. Eliot wore away, she perceived one thing incumbent on her: to make the advances. It was only a question with her of waiting until it would avail to break the ice, for she saw that to let him do so would be to give him such a tactical advantage as to make her last state worse than her first.

One night he came home to dinner unusually late. June had gone to the market to quarrel with her butcher, the dining-room was deserted, and Mrs. Eliot, when she heard the doctor going to dinner, left the porch and followed him downstairs.

"You are late to-night," said she, passing straight through to the kitchen as he bowed, seated himself and tapped the bell. There was a moment's delay in the serving. His dinner was not quite hot enough to suit

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Mrs. Eliot, and she took hold at the range herself before the dishes were allowed to go in. Julie brought from the ice box the special portion of lettuce that Mrs. Eliot earlier had seen reserved, and after it was ready to be sent in Mrs. Eliot returned to the dining-room and seated herself at the table near Doctor Bryson. Nannie placed the lettuce, a royal dish of it, in front of her, and Mrs. Eliot without ado began preparing the doctor's salad, he meantime being much absorbed in a thick whitefish steak.

Mrs. Eliot dried and shredded the leaves with composure. The oil, the salt, the slices of lemon, the grated Roquefort and the pepper were arranged before her.

"I can never remember, doctor, whether it is the salt or the lemon next?" she asked presently, lifting her eyes under her brows.

"The salt," he answered, sulkily.

"Is this oil as good as that you brought home last time from the office?"

"No."

"June said it was the best she could buy." No answer. "The oil you brought was exceptionally fine. Where did you get it?"

"From a friend."

"Why is it," she asked, mildly curious, "June can't buy oil as good as that?"

"I trust you don't suppose I'd be carrying olive oil home myself if it was the kind you can buy at stores."

"It wouldn't be like you," and after a pause, "Who was it you told me gave it to you?"

"A friend."

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"How did your friend happen to get hold of it?"

"He imports it."

"Oh! Is that enough juice, I wonder?" she asked, squeezing a slice of lemon over the mixture. "I had a letter from Mrs. Goddard this morning." No comment, unless a sudden and vigorous salting of the whitefish could be so construed. "She says Mr. Goddard will not be down till next week."

"I am glad he has more sense than to think of coming back to Chicago in heat like this. There were nine deaths from sunstroke to-day and thirty-three prostrations. Did you go down town to-day?"

"Yes, I gave five lessons."

"You shouldn't have gone out of the house."

"I didn't feel the heat much. There's a breeze out on the porch," she added, when some minutes later he had finished. "It is the coolest place I've found since dinner."

John Allison had the general manager's car out that night with a trolley party, but Mrs. Eliot had begged off and Bryson admitted bluntly he was tired. When he came from his room he joined Mrs. Eliot on the porch. They talked little as they sat together and there were long intervals of absolute silence; but in the darkness and the relief from the heat of the day there was companionship even in silence.

"I suppose you are determined to bring Ruth back," he remarked, after a long period of reflection.

"I determined that I ought to before I wrote for her."

"I understand, of course, why you do it."

"If you quite understood," said she, laying just a

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bare stress on the third word, "you would feel neither annoyed nor aggrieved."

"I have no right, in any event, to feel either; but I don't seem to be able to help it."

"You have earned the right to feel solicitous because you saved her life. Who could have a better right? It surely is not a matter of life and death to bring her back now. If I do it, it is because I consider her own welfare first of all, doctor."

"I merely make the point that it is unnecessary," said he, stiffly.

"How can you be sure of that?"

"My word ought to carry some weight—even with you."

"It carries more than anybody's in the world."

"Then when I tell you not to bring her back you should not do it." Mrs. Eliot made no reply. "For you still to feel that you need a protector," he continued, "is a humiliation I didn't think you would put on me."

"I put none on you, doctor; indeed, I do not."

"You say you don't, but you do."

"If there is any I put it on myself."

"Mere evasion," he muttered.

"It is not," she protested. "I have been sincere with you."

"And have I not with you?" he demanded, fiercely.

"Yes."

"Then you know and I know that you bring back Ruth at the risk of her health because you are afraid of me."

"You misjudge me."

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He gave an incredulous exclamation: one of those that cost so little and cut so deep.

"I can only repeat, you misjudge me," she said in a low voice.

"And I can only repeat, you fear me."

"It is not you I fear."

"Pray who then?"

"Can you be cruel enough to make me say it?" Something in her tone silenced him. At her breaking utterance he felt suddenly overwhelmed. "If you can," he could not see that tears were no longer dropping from her cheeks, nor that her face was burning, "if you can—then may the darkness hide my shame—I humiliate myself before you to say I fear myself."

When he could speak, "Helen," he pleaded, "I swear to you I had no more idea than a babe unborn what you were going to say. I did not mean to humiliate you. I would rather give my right hand than cause you, knowingly, one minute's pain."

"I know that," she answered, calmly; "it is I who am to blame in this whole matter."

"No."

"Yes, I; and God will send some fearful punishment upon me for it. I deserve this and more." She rose.

"Good night."

"I didn't know what I was doing, believe me." He was hanging on her steps. "Forgive me if you can."

Going, she whispered, "Yes." And at the door, "Yes; good night."

The next week did not bring Ruth.

"She is doing so well, my dear," wrote Mrs. Goddard, "that it would be a *sin* and a *shame* to take her

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back to that *pot* of a town while it is so hot. I just told Mr. Goddard he should *not* do it. Doctor Bryson, I know, would *never* approve of it. Now I'll tell you what you can do. If you want to see Ruth you just get on the boat and come *up* here to Grand Bay yourself for the rest of the season and see her grow *big* and *brown* and *dig* in the sand. It is only six weeks till we all go back. Now don't write, but *come*."

Mrs. Eliot, between smiling and tears, read the whole letter aloud at the dinner table. Everybody cried go. Doctor Bryson, non-committal at first, joined next morning in urging her to go. "It will give you a new lease on life," he said to her. "You need it. This heat breaks down a woman quicker than it does a man. She shouldn't be brought back; you go and see her. You can get away now for six weeks, and you will come back another woman. I don't mean that, either. Come back the same woman," he laughed, "only stronger."

June urged. Everybody urged. The opportunity seemed precise. Mrs. Eliot said she would go.

Her preparations were made within the week.

"Don't buy any tickets," remarked Doctor Bryson one evening to her. "I'll attend to the transportation."

"I shan't let you buy any tickets, doctor; I mean it," she said in alarm. "You shall not do it, remember. I will buy them myself."

"Now, keep perfectly cool. I'm not going to buy any tickets. I shall get you passes; they won't cost me anything; I will merely save you that much money. You don't object to that, do you?"

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"You have a kind heart. Sometime you will be rewarded for it—"

"Gad, I hope so," he said grimly.

"I want to have a talk with you to-night."

"All right; we'll go driving then."

"For the last time."

He started. "What do you mean?"

She smiled faintly. "The boat may sink; I may be drowned."

"Don't, for Heaven's sake, joke about things like that. Come, eat a good dinner and you'll feel better."

The team was at the door at seven o'clock and they got an early start. It was a mild evening. The boulevard was cool, not crowded, and the clank of the pole chains in the prosperous sunset sounded satisfying.

"What did you want to talk about?" he asked, easing the horses down as they swung into the Midway.

"About you and me."

"I don't know of two more interesting subjects."

"I have been thinking."

"You shouldn't; it's too hot."

"We are in a frightful situation."

"These people riding by would never suspect it."

"I wish I could meet your good spirits."

"Do."

"I can't to-night. I must tell you what we must do. The path we are on will end in unhappiness and ruin for you and for me."

"Then for God's sake get a divorce and have done with it. Let me marry you."

"I have no right to marry you, and you have none

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to marry me while my husband lives. Divorce would only brand that on my heart. I should feel just as criminal; it would be just as criminal. Doctor, I cannot. I have struggled—tried to force myself into thinking it—I cannot. And yet I have fastened to your heart, your good generous heart, like a parasite, and I take the affection that should go to a free woman. And I know it all, and wring my hands—and drift. Is it not frightful? Oh, frightful!”

“My dear one, you are in a highly nervous condition. This is the result of unnecessary worry.”

“No; inevitable remorse. I know what it is. I know my duty. You have done everything that one rich and generous and strong can do for one poor and weak. I know my duty now and I want you to help me do it. Will you?”

“I will do everything I can to make you happy.”

“When I come back I am going to Evanston to live. That is the first thing. Your home is with Miss June and you will stay with her. I must go away, and I shall. I don’t want to say you are never to come to see me—”

“Humph!”

“But under different roofs people can think differently; under one, placed as you and I are, we can’t. It would be best, perhaps, if we could each say we would not meet again. But I know how easy it is to promise one’s self more than can be kept. Other interests will come into your life, and at the very least we shall meet less often; that will make it easier.”

“Something like cutting a dog’s tail off an inch at a time.”

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"It will be a step, and when the way—is heavy—and the feet weak—one step is something. It is for you I ask it; for you as well as Ruth. You two are the real sufferers. You both have life ahead; my life is behind. I am nothing; only a dead limb. You are strong. Will you help?"

"You think I am strong?" He smiled faintly. "Strong? I'm a baby in your hands. Strength?" Resting the elbow of the rein arm on his knee, and clasping with one hand the lazy back behind her, he looked full into her face. "Just the sight of your eyes takes the last particle of strength out of me. I may be strong in some ways; not against you. You make me weak and faint. You are chloroform to me until I drink in all your sweetness; then I go raging. I have no strength against you, dear one; what's the use pretending? I take a magnet—so big you couldn't lift it—and with it pull a particle of steel—so small you couldn't see it—out of a man's eye. And you—little weak you, such a tiny magnet—with the mere raising of a pair of eyelids strip me of the whole armor I fight the battle of life with. You say I have my life before me. Be it so; my life is wholly in your hands; that's the situation. You talk of other interests—there are none."

"Your profession, your success, your fame—"

"What are they without you? What do they mean to me? I've starved myself and worked like a slave to get where I am, haven't I? You know that, for I've told you everything that ever happened to me—some things, perhaps, I oughtn't to have told you. But you come near knowing it all. And the

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first time I set eyes on you at the water cooler something went out of me to you. I can't explain it; I felt it, that's all. You don't know even yet, because I didn't want to make it seem anything, what a fearful time I had with Kurd to force him out of Ruth's case. I did it as coldly as a wolf would drive a coyote from a wounded antelope. I knew you had no money; it couldn't have been avarice, could it? I was determined to have something to do with you, and I lay awake night after night figuring how to save that child's eye after the whole faculty had said it couldn't be done."

"You know—you know how I bless you for it?"

"I'm not leaning on it for credit. I don't deserve any credit. It's the motive I'm telling you of. I did it all only to please you. That's the exact truth; that's all there is to it. I enjoyed my success because it drew me to you. All the pleasure I get out of success and money is to bring it before you—to tell you about it and hear you say what a devil of a fellow I am. You say the fault that we've drifted together is all yours. That's because you're innocent, dear one. You don't know a fraction of what I've done to make it come so and bind you to me. Don't cry; I can't stand it to see you cry, unless I might kiss away your tears. I get thirsty for them nights when I lie awake and you're asleep, and I want to go to your room and kiss them off your cheeks. I came awfully near doing it one night—not that night, but another night you don't know anything about."

"You mustn't talk in that way. Sit around straight again, do, please."

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The sun was sinking behind the wooded island; the night air drew in swift off the lake, and under the leash of his iron hand the sleek horses rocked in their trappings like the tiny yachts bobbing in the offing.

"Do you ever realize," he went on, "what you've done for me? Half my education has been of you. You've taught me even what kind of clothes to wear, haven't you? I mean, told me when I asked you, what was good taste and what bad. I didn't know what colors were till you taught me. Every day I use hints you drop about the thousand finer things of life, things about books and pictures and men and manners; things I never had the chance to learn till you taught me. Do you really think you owe me anything? Not a thing. I owe you everything.

"And now—what do you propose? To root it all up? Can it be done? I doubt it. At the same time I realize how this strain is wearing on you. It pulls sometimes on me, and I'm not going to see you worn to a nervous wreck with it. I love you too much to do anything; mark me—anything—that would hurt you. I have seen how you have failed lately because it's my business to see such things in anybody, and I shouldn't be likely to miss it in you. Anything you please to ease the strain on you I'll agree to. But when you talk of my giving you up—I might as well give up the whole game, just exactly. Profession, fame? What are they without you? Nothing; not a thing. Do you say you are dead, dear one? Dead? Then move over a little in your grave, please, and give me a chance to crawl in next to you. That's all I want; I'm not looking for the earth."

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was morning at the office of Dr. Bryson, Surgeon-in-chief of the Eye at the Laflin College, and things were strained. Jim had come in from Rush Street with the boat transportation, and it was not right.

"Did you tell Mitchell I wanted passes?" demanded Doctor Bryson, glaring at the tickets and at his messenger.

"Yes, sir," contended Jim. "He said these were the same things."

"Take them back and tell him I don't want his tickets. If he can't give me what I ask for he can go to the devil!" exclaimed the doctor, angrily.

But Mr. Edward Mitchell, besides being an ex-member of the Annex set, a particular friend of Doctor Bryson and treasurer of the Northland Navigation Company, was likewise a philosopher. When he received Bryson's message, in no degree softened by the messenger, he jumped into a cab and came over to the College with Jim.

"You said I could go to the devil, Harry," remarked Mitchell, greeting Bryson, affably, "and I came as fast as a horse would carry me. Now what are you kicking about? You sent for transportation for one to Grand Bay and return—"

"I sent for a pass for one to Grand Bay and return; you sent tickets."

Doctor Bryson

"They'll carry you just as far as passes, won't they?"

"I don't want tickets. If I'd wanted tickets, I'd have bought tickets. I wanted passes."

"My dear fellow, as long as they don't cost you anything, there's no difference whatever," began Mitchell suavely, for Bryson was not perceptibly cooling.

"Look here," cut in the surgeon, shortly, "you fellows over there have been jollyng me for two years about wanting to do something for me, haven't you? You've sent me passes over here again and again, haven't you? To Duluth and to Buffalo and the Saulte and the deuce knows where. I never rode on one of your infernal old boats—"

"Don't mind the treasurer's feelings."

"And I never will."

"You're dead, doctor, but not buried, remember."

"I wanted these passes for a friend of mine that's going up to-morrow, and I wanted passes, not tickets."

"I see, doctor. The fact is, we've gone into an ironclad agreement with all the lake lines not to issue passes this season; that's why I couldn't send you what you wanted. But I will do it. Calm yourself. It shall be done, if we bu'st the whole condemned association. Let your boy come over with me."

"I'm putting you to a whole lot of trouble, Ed," said Bryson apologetically.

"Not a bit; no trouble at all. I wouldn't lie about a little thing like that."

"How are the old man's eyes, Ed?" asked the doctor, taking new ground calmly.

"He can see a trout in ten feet of water. Egad, if

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you hadn't fixed him out he'd have sold the line and I'd been out of a job."

Bryson laughed. "You've got too much money now, Ed."

"He wants you to go on the Nepigon in September, doctor. Say, do you think the cataracts will ever come back on him?"

"No. How are your wife's glasses?"

"Well, there's such a thing as having too much of a good thing, you know. She says she can see clean through my pocketbook with them."

"If that's the case we'd better give her a weaker pair of lenses," laughed Bryson. "How's the yacht?"

Mitchell's face brightened like a boy's. "Harry, she's the prettiest thing afloat; the prettiest craft on the lakes, and bar none. I claim to know something about boats—"

"You ought to—"

"When you get tired of life just take one week on 'The Sweetheart' with me. I'll make you wish you could live a hundred years," declared Mitchell, breaking away.

"Ed, I'm awfully obliged to you. Sorry to have put you to all this trouble," apologized Bryson, following the affable steamboat man out.

"If I don't get even with you, it's not my fault," retorted Mitchell. "Try hard, anyway. Good bye. God bless you."

An hour later, at the risk of shattering the passenger agreement, the transportation arrived. This time it was in due form, and Doctor Bryson examined it with satisfaction. He left his office early in the after-

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noon. When he walked upstairs at Miss June's, Mrs. Eliot's door was thrown wide open and her trunk stood in the middle of the room. June and she, in the middle of chairs and tables and couches strewn with the plumage of woman, looked flushed. It was the packing.

Mrs. Eliot's face lighted girlishly. "Don't look in, doctor," she exclaimed. "It's confusion worse confounded. If Miss June hadn't come up I should never have got packed in the world."

Doctor Bryson leaned hungrily against the door casing, as June knelt authoritatively in front of the trunk. The mere sight of her belongings made his head reel. "Humph! Do you call this packed?" said he in words a thousandfold quieter than his thoughts. "If you depend on her to pack it, you won't get off till September. Let me come in. I can pack your trunk in thirty minutes by the watch.

"Oh-p! Well, if you ain't cheeky!" declared June, on her knees. "I like that. Just get out of here, Sister Bryson. When we need *you* we'll holler." He stuck his fingers lazily in his waistcoat pocket, June eyeing him from the floor.

"There's always something good comes out of that pocket," exclaimed June, with a twinkle. "He never puts his fingers into that pocket that way without something good coming out." Mrs. Eliot, with a parasol in one hand and a camera in the other, stood rosily awaiting developments. Bryson smiled, and held a little envelope toward her.

"What is it, doctor?" she asked quizzically.

"Your transportation."

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"Oh, Doctor Bryson, did you really get passes for me?"

"I did."

"Thank you *ever* so much. But it is a shame to have put you to that trouble."

"Oh, it wasn't any trouble."

"Not a bit?"

"Not the least in the world." June jumped up from her packing and looked eagerly over Mrs. Eliot's shoulder at the coveted prize. "My cracky! I've lived twenty years longer than you have," she exclaimed to Mrs. Eliot, "and nobody ever got *me* a pass yet."

"There are your meal coupons," explained the doctor, handing Mrs. Eliot additional credentials. "Complimentary, see? You hand this little book to the dining-room cashier with your table check. He detaches a coupon."

"Free meals?" cried June, incredulously. "Can you eat all you want?"

"All you want."

"It would be just my luck to be seasick, anyway, if I had 'em," reflected June. "Well, I don't care. If you're seasick, give 'em to somebody else to use."

"In other words, beat the company," put in Bryson. "That's June all over; they ought to be swindled, of course, for granting me a favor."

"I don't care; they're a corporation," grumbled the anti-monopolist.

"Oh, how did you get all these?" interposed Mrs. Eliot, in a low tone. "How should they give them to you?"

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"The president of the company was losing his sight—he is pretty old—was going to sell out the line. The young partners were nearly crazy, and after they had chased all over the country to save his eyes without getting any results, Mitchell brought him to me. There were some complications, but I was lucky."

"Well, I don't care," repeated June, "you're just the sweetest old thing in the world, anyway, for thinking of it," she cried, advancing on the unsuspecting surgeon. "I don't suppose she'd kiss you for it, but I would, and I'm goin' to," and throwing her arms around Bryson's neck she kissed him unsparingly. She tried then to break away quick, but that was different. She found herself suddenly in the vise of the doctor's own arms and he kissed her again and again before she could squirm and twist and shriek away from him. Mrs. Eliot sat down and laughed into tears.

"You're perfectly scandalous," stormed June. "Why, look at him! He doesn't look as if he could harm a fly, does he?" she declared, arranging her hair-pins indignantly.

"Don't monkey with the buzz-saw," murmured Bryson, leaning again in the doorway. He caught Mrs. Eliot's glance as he spoke; caught a bubble of comprehension in her eyes as she laughed, and he laughed with her. The dinner bell rang just as June got down on her knees again to pack. She threw up her hands. "I declare, it seems something interferes the minute I get started at this trunk. I have got down here a dozen times to begin, and haven't got started yet."

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"And you never will," predicted the doctor. About ten o'clock that night when he looked in, hungry, June had started in earnest.

"Now clear out, both of you," she commanded. "You just make me nervous. Go downstairs and in an hour I'll be through."

Mrs. Eliot rose from the couch, laid down the parasol and the camera, on which she had made no material advance during the evening; that is, they appeared no nearer packed than ever, and she was now clinging to them in a sort of feeble-minded way. She laid them on the table and started downstairs behind the doctor, who, for the evening, had assumed a suit of white flannel. She opened the screen door tentatively as he turned at the foot of the stairs.

"No," he begged, quietly, "this way. I want some music."

"But Mr. Allison and Mary have both gone to their rooms. It would disturb them."

"Nonsense," he responded, turning on a gas jet, "they won't care." She seated herself at the piano and ran her fingers over the keys.

"Can you see if I turn this jet off and light one in the back parlor?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then I'll do it. I want to sit here in the dark to listen."

"What shall I play?" she asked, when he had come back and seated himself. Her mood seemed to lighten as she turned to the piano, and in a few moments her hands were dipping above the keys as swallows when

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the sun sets in August hover and strike at the flow of a river.

"That's right; jolly them up," he exclaimed with satisfaction. She laughed and struck again and again, till the keys did, in truth, take life from her fingers.

"There are all sorts of colors dancing around here now," she murmured, lightly. "What do you want? What shall I play? Quick."

"The Flatterer."

She swayed a sudden answer to the plea, leaned forward, and with an exquisite caprice melted a group of heavy chords into the delicate opening of the French song. He bent forward in his chair, and putting up his hands, stared into distance.

For a week it was all he could remember; the dark of the parlor, the heady music, the fragrance of the woman, the ripple of her fingers, the looseness of her hair. That, and her slender figure standing in the sunshine the next afternoon on the steamer's deck, a broad plumed hat of straw dipping light as a gull over her head, as she waved good byes, until a two-hundred-pound brute of a fellow elbowed her from the rail, and she was gone.

After a week he quieted down and began to marvel at how well he was standing the separation. A week went, and a month, quiet as night. Bryson drove with Mary Montague and with John to the summer concerts, and congratulated himself on how unexpectedly well he was behaving. He had promised not to write, and she purposely wrote to no one at the house. An occasional word from Mrs. Goddard to

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Mary was the only word they had from the Michigan cottagers.

But one morning Doctor Bryson, while despatching his grist of patients, was confronted by a young man that gave him a shock. He was not above twenty years; a handsome fellow in a lazy tweed travelling suit. A piece of adhesive plaster covered a wound above his right eyebrow; the eye itself was inflamed.

"I'm just in from Denver," he explained. "I came over the Burlington. I was sitting in the smoking-room of the sleeper, and when we were pulling into town this morning some kid threw a stone through the car window and a piece of glass struck me right over the eye. The company surgeon at the depot fixed up my forehead. I bled like a pig for a while," laughed the young man, briskly, "and then he sent me over here in a cab to have you see whether there was any glass in my eye."

While he was talking Bryson was inspecting him. Critically, at first, as he looked over every new face that came to him; then with surprise and wonder, for some indefinable thing about the boy's face stirred him.

It was a delicate face, feminine almost, the nostrils sensitive and the eyes frankly appealing. The cold-featured Doctor Bryson listened without hearing, and with his faculties still disordered, made his visitor repeat all he had said, studying the while his nose and mouth, the way he said "glass" and "with" and "forehead," and the way he sustained an inflection at the end of a sentence, and a certain manner he had of talking straight ahead till his breath was quite gone.

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Then to Doctor Bryson's incertitude a verdict was made fast. Startling and improbable as it seemed even in the making, it read in his mind, "This is her brother."

Every move of the affable surgeon after that was made in that conviction. Doubt asserted and reasserted itself, only to give way before facial expressions and mannerisms of tongue and voice so palpable as to be unmistakable, and Doctor Bryson grew inly excited and "threw himself," as June would say, to make, like a huge surprised spider, the most of his chance fly.

He took the young man's vision carefully, watching, while the latter read, the length, shape and fall of his fingers as his hand rested on his knees, knowing, whoever he was, as he mused to himself, wherever he came from, he was her brother. Turning him finally to the light and putting a powerful lens over the injured eye to examine it, he could feel a sensation of faintness almost as if she herself were close under his scrutiny and the eyes turned confiding to his were still her very own.

"Can you see anything, doctor?" asked the unknown.

"Glass—the glass that does the mischief—is the hardest thing in the world to find in the eye," replied Bryson, after a long search. "I'll look at your eye again after a while in the dark-room. Take a seat over there by the window. Look down. By the way, what is your name?" he asked, putting some drops into the inflamed eye.

"Dempster, W. D. Dempster. My people used to

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live in Evanston, but I've lived in Denver the last three years with an uncle."

Dempster—Helen Dempster was Mrs. Eliot's maiden name. He knew that from June.

"What are you doing there?" continued Bryson, straightening up.

"Mining."

"You have some relatives here?"

"I've a sister that's married."

"Mrs. Eliot?"

"Why, do you know her?"

"We board at the same place on the South Side. Keep your eye closed a while. Take a seat over there by the window."

After a second examination and an assurance to Mr. Will Dempster that there was no glass in his eye, the doctor chatted about his sister's pretty little girl, Ruth. Will Dempster was in no wise backward about pursuing the pleasant acquaintance, and in the end Bryson insisted on taking him to luncheon at the Athletic Club. There he sat and fed on the boy and listened to his talk, told him where his sister was, and entertained him royally. The young man, whose very feet and hands continually suggested the daintiness of his sister, promised to come around again in the morning.

"Who is he?" asked Bryson of June that night. "I never heard her speak of a brother. Do you know him?"

"What, Will Dempster? Well, I guess I do. He's a skidamarink, that fellow."

"What's that?"

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"A ne'er-do-weel," said June, discussing the handsome boy candidly. "He's a cross to her. She's tried for years to straighten him out. He'll never straighten out for anybody."

"He doesn't look over eighteen."

"Eighteen? He's twenty-two, if he's a day."

Next day Master Will Dempster did look a little older, but a more lovable boy Bryson thought he had never met in the world, and when it came to telling stories he kept Bryson laughing by the hour. At luncheon Will asked if the doctor knew his sister's husband, Eliot.

"I've met him."

"There's a chap for you. He's the damnedest fellow you ever saw," declared Will, breezily. "He's great on family and schemes and things."

"Schemes?" echoed Bryson, lazily, enjoying the rattle.

"Schemes?" re-echoed Will, stimulated by the cocktail with which, when someone else paid for it, he always began a meal. He paused to laugh, "Why, that fellow wouldn't stop at anything when he gets started. He used to take quinine, and every time he had a good dose on he'd start a new scheme—the world was his. He hadn't any idea of business on earth, but he could plan more schemes than a Utah Gentle."

"Is that so?" asked Bryson, leadingly.

"That's right. Why, that fellow," declared Will—as handsome a vagabond as ever graced a dining-room, leading, rosy-cheeked, to a climax—"that fellow

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wouldn't hesitate to start a fire insurance company in hell."

There was no end to this sort of jokes. For a week he came in daily to see Doctor Bryson. At the end of that time he explained that his uncle's remittances had failed to arrive. Doctor Bryson promptly handed him a hundred dollars.

"That settles it," declared June that night. "You'll never see *that* fellow again."

She was right. Bryson never did see him again. Willie disappeared permanently.

"Not much like his sister," mused Bryson over his dessert. "I'd like to see anybody succeed in making her accept a temporary advance."

"You'll look a long way before you can find a woman in the world like her, I can tell you, doctor. Why don't you marry her?" Bryson started. "I mean it. I can see things, I guess, when they're stuck under my nose, can't I?"

"June, I'd give my right hand if she'd marry me. She's queer about divorce—and things. She won't marry as long as that man Eliot lives."

"Oh, pshaw," sniffed June, "there's no use being a crank. Just as good people as she get divorces. You're too easy, doctor. Tell her you are going to marry her, divorce or no divorce, and you see. Some women imagine nothing in the world will start 'em. You just let a mouse loose on 'em, and see what they'll do."

"What's that?" exclaimed Bryson, jumping half out of his chair as he pointed to the floor with a terror-

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stricken face. "See there! Isn't that a great big mouse there, right now?"

"Godfrey Martin!" cried June, dodging behind his chair with an inconceivably quick spring. "Kill it," she gasped. "Where is it, doctor?"

"Sit down. There isn't any mouse."

"You miserable, mean thing, what are you trying to scare me for? I hope you don't want to marry me, do you?"

"I wanted to know how to classify you," said Bryson, languidly. Then he shook his head. "She wouldn't jump like that."

"Well, I bet she would, just the same," declared the flushed and offended June, reseating herself. "I've heard all I want to about this remarkable woman business. When you come to test them they are everyone just exactly like any old woman." He pushed away his plate and leaned back in his chair.

"Not just exactly, June. She's not. I was with her once in a parade down town. The time you were in Cleveland. We started to get from State to Wabash, and a cross-current in the crowd pocketed us on Jackson Boulevard. You know what one of those downtown crowds is. On top of that, just as they shoved us into the middle of the street, a runaway team, dragging a brougham along like a sulky, swung into the Boulevard from Wabash and jumped right into the crowd. They were tremendous big horses, and they cut into that jam like a lawn mower. There must have been a thousand people that couldn't have moved six inches to save their lives, and the horses reared and struck right and left and cut people down—it

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looked like a slaughter house in two minutes. They ran the carriage pole right through a woman's back, June, and shoved her along hung up like a figure-head. Before we could think they were right on us. Mrs. Eliot was in front of me. Women were screaming, men yelling, and that woman on the carriage pole." He closed his eyes. "The off horse was so close he threw foam into my face. What do you think Mrs. Eliot did? I was scared sick. I couldn't, for Heaven, have got her behind me. I leaped over her and waved my arms at the crazy horse. I might as well have shaken a straw at him. But she tore her hat from her head and batted him across the eyes as fierce as anything you ever saw in your life, until he backed; and she followed him right up, June, till a man passed me a pistol. I cocked it right at her ear, and the brute's nose was so close that I fired within six inches of her head. Faint? Not much! Screamed? Never a sound. She was pressed so against me I could hear her breathing pretty hard; that was all. She asked me never to say anything about it," he mused, shifting in his chair. "That boy looks as much like her as a photograph, June. I'm sorry he's dropped me. He didn't know what a mark he had, did he? I'd have given him a hundred a week if he'd asked for it."

That night he could not sleep. She had come fearfully into his mind, and he could not sleep. Hour and hour he tossed and turned; it was useless. He got up, dressed himself, pulled a chair to the window and sat in the lake breeze. The room grew unendurable, and without waking John, whose door was open, he slipped out of the house, made for the Boulevard in

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the gaslight, walked far beyond, and crossing the dangerous railroad tracks, went straight to the lake shore, where it was dark. He stumbled out, sat down on a rotten pier and listened to the wash of the surf on the shingle. He liked it because the water at his feet reached to hers and made her seem nearer, and he sat a long time, hoping day would break. But day did not break, and when he slipped his passkey into the door again it was only three o'clock. When one tries to wear it completely out, a night is so long.

Walking upstairs, he could not get by her door, and he halted before it, leaning irresolutely against the banisters. He was mad for a sight of her face, and with the thought that there might be what she had always refused him, a photograph, somewhere in her room, he opened her door, entered the sitting-room, stood a moment in the dark, felt for a match, struck it and lit the curious red candle on her dresser. Her rooms were empty, but the spell of her presence was upon him. The indefinable fragrance of the apartments was like incense, and he groped about, candle in hand, looking for a photograph. There were pictures of girls all about, pupils, friends, and in a leathern case a beautiful photograph of Ruth. He got to the bedroom door with his heart beating wild; looked silently at her bed and its whiteness; tiptoed to it, and bent over it; breathed of her pillow as one does of lilies, then bending lower, kissed it.

CHAPTER XIX

THE Goddard Cottage on Grand Bay lies toward the East Arm, where it is quiet, and the summer days are much alike. Mrs. Goddard and such guests as summer with her cultivate the art of laziness and indulge in nothing more active than driving. But the drives in Michigan are attractive, for the poorest country road gives contrast to the accursed sameness of the city park and boulevard—that Chicago monotony of house and curb and lawn and elm that invites an ultimate mental collapse.

After Mrs. Eliot, arriving at the Goddard Cottage, had smothered Ruth in a press of kisses choked with grateful smiles, and shone rainbow-like, through a shower of summer tears, Mrs. Goddard, relentless as a permanent cottager, took her in hand to show her the places and the things, for Grand Bay is rich in both. The fever on water, land, among the neighbors and on the porch lasted a fortnight. Then Mrs. Goddard resumed her hammock and her novel, gave the usual programme to the colored maid in the kitchen, and left Mrs. Eliot to her own devices, which were to taste with Ruth the woods, the birds, the mosses, the vines; the flowers, the mushrooms, the berries; the rocks, the sands and the surf.

With Mrs. Eliot the gay of the day went in the shade of the trees or along the stretches of cool green above the headland: the decline went to the children's

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bathing, the cliffs, the footpaths, or to the rowboat under the stars and song over the waters; and the night—Ruth tucked away—to the roaring beech logs in the big room; knees crossed in aching rest, arms akimboed, hair tossed, head drooped in musing; at confidences with Mrs. Goddard.

In six weeks this delicate, fair-skinned woman, with her pinkish ears and her gloved fingers and her dainty footgear, was hued to a hazel, her hair burnt o' the sun; brown handed, strong booted, reckless of sand and thorn and stone; a summer, low-voiced, burning-eyed amazon. And one morning off the point where before lay every morning only blue water and gold lay a yacht at anchor.

Why she always saw such things first, Mrs. Eliot could not tell. She and Ruth slept upstairs and the sun was hardly an hour high when she drew up her shades: and there lay the boat. The water was blue and gold, for the Grand Bay is as deep as the Bay of Naples, and the sky in August is Italian. The yacht was white and gold, slender as hope and as buoyant and strong. It lay a pretty boat, but she knew not all it meant as she gave a cry of delight and called through the summer floor down to Mrs. Goddard to announce the distinguished harbor visitor. In northern waters a yacht is the thing exclusive. Ruth, tumbling from bed, without a second call, at the news of a yacht, hugged the window while her mother dressed, and could not be coaxed to her waist and skirts. Her mother had just knotted her own hair when she heard footsteps up the hemlock sidewalk, a rapping at the

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door below and a startled darky mammy answering the voice of a man.

"This is Mrs. Goddard's cottage, isn't it? She's at home, I presume. Not up yet? Is Mrs. Eliot here? She is? Doctor Bryson's compliments to everybody, please."

In the summer cottage everyone hears at once; everyone screams at once; everyone talks at once, visitor and visited. From behind partitions came voices and welcomes and from before them came laughter and banter and replies, and Ruth, bounding from all restraint, scuttled downstairs in her night-gown to reach Doctor Bryson first and hug his neck and cuddle her feet in his waistcoat and tell him quick about the Indian man that had the toothache all day and lay under the point in the shade while his wife sold baskets. And she asked Doctor Bryson, while Mrs. Goddard hurled questions like old shoes over her partition, and from Mrs. Eliot's throat above ran all sorts of little trilling tunes, she, Ruth, not believing it herself, asked Doctor Bryson whether *he* believed the poor Indian's toothache could possibly have come from Milwaukee in a bottle, as old Colonel Cross said it had; and Doctor Bryson refused to believe it. Doctor Bryson thought, just as Mrs. Eliot appeared at the turn of the stairs, that a man with the toothache should have the benefit of a doubt.

He met her, half bending as he advanced, his eyes raised under his brows and both hands extended. On her part there was a frank quickening of feet as she put out her hands and an exclamation as he caught

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them. "You are looking so well, so *well*," he declared, marvelling.

"And you, too, doctor."

He gazed at her with admiring amazement. "Truly, I never saw you looking so well in your life," he cried, clinging unyieldingly to her fingers. She, after a quick, cordial pressure, was trying to escape his hands.

"Your yachting suit is stunning," she stammered, with a trace of confusion. "I saw it first; I mean the yacht. But I never dreamed *you* were here. Ruth, run right upstairs and dress yourself."

"I can't get over it," he exclaimed. "This is magic. You look like a gypsy queen. Where did I come from? Chicago, of course. That's Ed Mitchell's steam yacht out yonder, 'The Sweetheart,' up for the regatta in the West Arm next week. If we haven't had a ride! Mrs. Goddard, I congratulate you. You never dressed half so quickly in your life."

"Never had the incentive before, doctor," retorted Mrs. Goddard, smiling from flaming stuffs of morning hue.

"You look ten years younger than when I left you in Randolph Street; do you remember?"

"Oh, yes, I remember; you look ten years wickered than when I left you, doctor."

"Oh, mean! Well, you shouldn't have left me. Nobody should leave me."

"What on earth are you doing here?"

"Nothing on earth. I'm sleeping, eating, drinking on the water. But say," he added, speaking to both as all sat down, "on that yacht I have the surprise of your lives."

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"What is it?" they cried together.

"Never mind. It's the surprise of your lives. You'll never get it from me. Wait till you go aboard. By the way, how often do you breakfast here? I'm starved. Where's Goddard? West again? I'd make him sell out his mines, or I'd leave him."

"I've left him two or three times, but he won't stay left. I'll hurry up your breakfast. Tillie," she called, raising her voice to the kitchen, "Doctor Bryson is very hungry."

"Oh, yes'm."

"Hurry up, Tillie."

"Yes'm."

"That's the great advantage of a summer house," sighed Mrs. Goddard. "The walls are so accommodating. You can give orders to all parts of the house without leaving your chair. I'm getting fat on it. With a megaphone, if it's raining or anything, I can sit here and converse with any of the neighbors. Now tell us about it, like a good man, doctor. He looks so well in his yachting clothes, doesn't he, Mrs. Eliot? He certainly understands colors."

"Well, it's very easy. I was coming up to surprise you, but my ambition didn't extend to a private yacht. I sent Jim over Monday for tickets and Ed Mitchell heard of it. He came down to the College and said that he was going up Wednesday with his wife, and that I didn't have money enough to buy boat tickets when he had steam on 'The Sweetheart.' And I packed, and, by Peter, here I am. Merry Christmas! Mitchell went north on the up boat last night. Ruth, you'd better go dress, or you'll get killed. Bring

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your clothes down here and I'll help you, eh? Oh, you won't. Getting too big a young lady; I thought so. There's nobody very glad to see me, that's plain."

"Nobody glad to see you?" cried Mrs. Eliot.

"You horrid thing! What do you mean?" demanded Mrs. Goddard.

"Can't you see I'm in a state of collapse for something to eat?"

"Tillie!"

"Yes'm."

"Hurry breakfast, please."

"Oh, yes'm."

Mrs. Eliot sprang up. "Nobody glad to see him; isn't he polite, Mrs. Goddard? I'll get his breakfast myself!" And she did mostly get it, and it was very good and he was immensely grateful. He ate ravenously and talked like a boy.

After breakfast he gave them just time to dress over again for a call on Mrs. Mitchell aboard. The doctor had condensed all marine phraseology to "aboard" and "ashore."

Doctor Bryson and Ruth headed the procession for the boat, and the ladies, to the envy of the entire colony of cottagers, followed over to the pier, where a precise looking salt, who Doctor Bryson explained was a "bo'sun," saluted, and marshalling his crew of two lesser salts, handed his guests into his boat and pulled them swiftly out to the yacht.

"Everything is so novel, isn't it?" whispered Mrs. Goddard, with the homage that critical intelligence pays to luxury as the little party approached the white racer. Even when they reached the deck, and

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Mrs. Mitchell, whom they hadn't seen for a long time, ran forward to welcome them, Mrs. Goddard still spoke in the subdued tone that she descended to only in the presence of the mighty. It was a moment for admiration and enjoyment. The white of the upper outer equipment shaded into gold and within, the gold shaded into blue and mahogany, and in the cabin, a dream of cosiness and appointment, Doctor Bryson's surprise rose gloomily to meet them; it was June. They greeted her with screams.

"How are you, you sweet old thing?" cried Mrs. Eliot.

"I ain't very well," replied June, with a face as long as her waist. "This miserable old boat—excusing me, Mrs. Mitchell—teeters too much to suit me. I was doubled up all day yesterday," she said, gauntly, "and I ain't got one laugh left in the locker, if that's nauchical language."

The morning on "The Sweetheart" went like an hour. There was an orchestrelle in the cabin and a piano, and Mrs. Eliot played. Captain Larry, a wrinkled Scotchman, took Mrs. Eliot personally in hand and showed her the fine points of the boat with a spirit that made every rope's end interesting. At eleven o'clock sightseeing was done and a pleasurable fatigue felt; a breakfast was served in the after-cabin with the silence, the excellence and the savor of things well thought out. Doctor Bryson presided, Mrs. Mitchell on the right. Next to her Mrs. Eliot, who heard in asides how Doctor Bryson had saved her father's sight and how much her husband thought of him and how much she thought of him. Then, while the doctor joked at

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June, Mrs. Mitchell, as woman must, asked Mrs. Eliot in a whisper if she didn't think him just splendid.

"But how did you ever get June up here?" asked Mrs. Eliot of the doctor when he got a minute with her on deck.

"I'll tell you. John and Mary Montague have gone to Oconomowoc for a month; the house is empty, anyway, and June was 'busted' again, so I told her to come up here with me. I was afraid she'd snow me under with a new batch of bills, and I thought it cheaper to let her travel; that's about it. But she's a poor sailor. We'll have to leave her ashore somewhere up here. She swears she'll swim ashore if we don't land her. Now let me unfold the plan," he added, as Mrs. Goddard and Mrs. Mitchell came up. "I'm up here to see the country and I've got barely two weeks to do it in, so it is necessary to keep moving. Mr. Mitchell took the Mackinac boat last night. He couldn't stay over with us; we are going up to-night. You want us to dine ashore?" He appealed to Mrs. Goddard.

"And don't forget, doctor," put in Mrs. Mitchell, "Mr. Mitchell invites Mrs. Goddard and Mrs. Eliot for the little cruise you are to take before the regatta, while he is fishing."

"He and Mrs. Mitchell are going up on the Steel River for a few days after trout," explained the doctor, "and he puts 'The Sweetheart' at our disposal while they are gone. It's magnificent; royal; but what can you do? That's Ed Mitchell. He can't help it. When you see him to-morrow prepare to lose both your hearts, subject, of course, to Mrs. Mitchell's censor-

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ship. He grows handsomer yearly. Now, will you go?"

"Why, how perfectly delightful," exclaimed Mrs. Goddard, looking at Mrs. Eliot. "If we can arrange. I think we can. We certainly must!" repeated Mrs. Goddard. "Mrs. Mitchell, it has been the dream of my life to cruise. If I could cruise just once I think I could die."

June, very glad of Mrs. Goddard's invitation to dry land, went ashore with them. Mrs. Goddard, wild over the prospect of visiting her Mackinac friends in a yacht, thought the matter so little worth discussing that she was astonished when Mrs. Eliot demurred at the proposed trip.

"Well," said Mrs. Goddard, despairingly, sitting down in the midst of the finery she had already strewn over the bed, "if you are not going, of course I can't."

"Oh, now, Mrs. Goddard," protested Mrs. Eliot, "surely you can go and leave the rest of us here for a week."

"Go away while you are my guest—leave you here alone? I think not. You must go if I do, my dear. There's nothing on earth to keep you, is there? You can see the doctor has set his heart on it. June will stay here with Ruth. What is there to prevent your going?"

The situation reduced itself for Mrs. Eliot to submission or open rebellion. June, after one hour on solid earth, had recovered her spirits and urged her to go. Ruth urged. Mrs. Goddard no longer urged; she looked crushed.

"I will go, my dear," said the bewildered lady at

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last to Ruth, who clung to her neck, "and may God keep you and me safe until my arms fold you again."

The cottage dinner in the evening was gay and afterward a sort of reception was given on board "The Sweetheart," favored colonists of the resort being accorded the freedom of the yacht. At the last moment sailing was deferred until morning, and the slight change in the programme seemed to relieve Mrs. Eliot of the strain that had come over her. She took of the gayety of the company and was merry with the merry. The cabins cleared and thrown together gave a tiny sweep for dancing. There was singing and two-stepping, and, to her mother's playing, Doctor Bryson danced with Ruth, swinging her at arms' length rhythmically as a mower swings his cradle. There was a moon over the bay, and late in the evening "The Sweetheart" steamed around the lighthouse and into the West Arm, where a monster beach fire shot a glare far up and down the shore line and distant song floated across the water. When the big yacht anchored again it was midnight and the resorters, intoxicated with pleasure, were rowed ashore.

Next morning in the sunshine it was not half so hard to say good bye. Everything seemed so much more feasible and so much easier, and the adieus waved to Ruth and June and the crowd on the dock and boomed by the pretty brass cannon from the deck were infinitely less painful to one uneasy heart than they had seemed twelve hours earlier.

Mrs. Mitchell and Mrs. Eliot were with the Captain, and Mrs. Goddard and the doctor, aft in steamer

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chairs, were talking Chicago under cunningly devised awnings that shaded all and hid nothing.

"Do you know," remarked Bryson, drawing his chair to a vis-à-vis with Mrs. Eliot when Mrs. Mitchell took Mrs. Goddard in hand, "this is my first vacation?"

"Since when?"

"Since I was born."

"You don't mean you've never had a vacation in all your life?"

"Never in all my life."

"Why, doctor!"

"I have worked ever since I was old enough to know what work was. This week, out of all the weeks that have gone before, is mine own, by Heaven. And isn't this Heaven?" he exclaimed, as the firred shores of the Grand Bay insensibly receded and the throbbing yacht dipped her nose into the darker, heavier waters of the lake. "Such sun, such scenery, such air. Oh, this is air! Here I've talked about it for years and told my patients they must have it—I suppose I've sent five hundred people to Lake Superior and never breathed its air myself." He took a great breath. "Day before yesterday," he went on, "I sat in the office till noon. The clinic was pretty heavy and the strange thing is, those eye cases come in groups. One day it is all one thing, myopia or astigmatism, or foreign bodies, and the next, perhaps, all old people with cataracts or mere presbyopia. Day before yesterday there were seven cases, and bad ones, every one, of choroiditis. That's more choroiditis than the ordinary oculist runs against in a month. Do you see

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that lighthouse over there? Isn't it pretty, dear?" he asked, his tone falling. "We went ashore there yesterday. The engineer shut down for something and Mrs. Mitchell and I went ashore. She knows the people. The keeper has been there for thirty-one years; think of it."

"Alone?"

"No, bless you, his wife. And he has been blind seventeen years of that time."

"Why, how can he manage the light?"

"He doesn't; his wife has attended to it ever since he went blind."

"Poor man. Oh, it must be dreadful to be blind. What is the matter with his eyes?"

He was about to answer when he checked himself. He never spoke before her of glaucoma. He knew her fears for Ruth, and kept the spectre from her mother's mind. Nor did he tell how, when Mrs. Mitchell had introduced him to the slender, gray-haired woman at the lighthouse and told her he was a famous eye surgeon, tears had followed the little woman's smile and she had asked him please to look at her husband's eyes. Nor did he say how he had asked the very old man to look down, and had felt with each forefinger of his eyeballs, first one and then the other—stony hard balls, each of them—and told him not to worry; that he would always have to use his wife's eyes, but to be glad he had such a wife.

"Atrophy of the optic nerves," replied Doctor Bryson to Mrs. Eliot, his eyes bent on the vanishing lighthouse. "But his wife is the brightest, happiest woman you ever saw. She showed us everything

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about the tower from top to bottom and explained things like a government inspector; she's wonderful. She fastens her skirts about her knees with a cord, in the way you've seen vaudeville people do for gymnastic turns, and she runs up and down the tower ladder like a trapeze performer. What, Mrs. Mitchell? Time to eat again? Well, it do beat all. And the worst of it is, I'm hungry every time."

CHAPTER XX

MACKINAC is the clearing house of northern summer travel. Here everybody tarries, touches, or at least passes, and at the height of the season Mackinac is a busy place. When "The Sweetheart" anchored off the island it was night. The straits gleamed with steamer lights or rung with the hoarse bay of whistles or echoed to the faint chime of engine bells as silent monsters moved up and down the artery of the Great Lakes. The village twinkled its brightest; higher, the hotels, like huge electric signs, blazed a multitude of lamps; skyward, cottage windows, strung along the cliffs, shone dim like a Milky Way of stars.

In the morning the yawl was sent in for Mitchell, and, bringing mail and papers and magazines, he was kissed with unconscious ardor by his wife and smiled at by Mrs. Eliot, whom he handed in to breakfast with good-humored ceremony. With his arrival life on "The Sweetheart" took on the quick and strenuous. The presence in the North Country of Mr. Edward Mitchell, treasurer of the Northland Navigation Company, was like the presence of a lord on his distant estates. Everyone wanted to see him; everyone had a petition to present, a favor to ask, an offering to tender, an invitation to extend. Not only was the yacht crew kept busy skimming to and from port, but a procession of launches and lesser craft sought "The Sweetheart" continually for conference with Ed-

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ward Mitchell, who despatched business like an admiral, presided at the table like a duke, laughed in abeyance over a quill of a cigar, told marvelous stories to Mrs. Goddard in the deck moonlight or listened to the music of Mrs. Eliot below. He was in ~~this~~ way a wonder; in this knack of satisfying suitors whom he refused, in drawing people out of themselves and in making about him an atmosphere colored to the life of the day, the hour. The dinners on the yacht took on new character after Mitchell assumed the ordering. The abundance of northern waters was offered on the table. Chicago markets were drawn on daily and the wines of "The Sweetheart," always in evidence, showed discrimination. The eating and the sleeping, the seeing and the hearing, even the delicate glasses of wine served to the women and the harder quantities taken by the men, spread a sort of magic haze over the waters and the shores, like the softness of an Indian Summer come in August.

For a week never an hour passed without its excitement, and no day without its guest. One day it was Grand Hotel people to discuss a shorter Chicago schedule for the following season; another, a Canadian yachting party with plans for a passenger service from the Lakes to Collingwood and the Sound. Ed Mitchell's friends were of that class of business men and public men who travel in a large way, entertain like lords and expect so to be entertained, and it was part of "The Sweetheart" code to furnish forth such hospitality. Living for a brief week in an air like this is the tonic of a year's ordinary existence. To sit at table

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with railroad men, mining men, masters of commerce and of transportation, men of striking personality and matured wit, was a stimulant. With such men Doctor Bryson was at ease. Nor did Mrs. Mitchell, Mrs. Eliot or Mrs. Goddard find difficulty in maintaining their position with the women of the parties. Entertainments were multiplied, excursions made a round.

"It's like another world, isn't it?" said Bryson to Mrs. Eliot one night. "The Sweetheart" party were guests at the Grand Hotel and it was on a private balcony of the great caravansary after dinner, with a moon in the full rising out of Lake Huron and the dance music of an orchestra below. Bryson had tucked Mrs. Eliot into a corner, a little from the rest, for a chat.

"We've thought we knew something about life down on the South Side, but I've been thinking we don't. This is life: these people with their private cars and yachts and summer palaces and fishing preserves and wooded domains; they understand the thing. It fires me to be with such people; and, Lord, how you shine!" he exclaimed, in softer tone. "When you sit down at the piano how they look—and listen! And aren't they jolly? Can't they sing, and dance, and tell stories? The only thing that's worrying me is that you'll not care much for me after seeing all these swell men."

His face turned to the east and in the shadows she looked through the dim light at him. Their heads were not far apart; hers was shrouded in a soft film of wool. She made no answer. His hand crept over her own. She did not take it away, but spoke without

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answering the pressure of his fingers: "I like the South Side home, don't you?"

"I love it, because I love you."

"They are very nice, of course, but I don't think these extraordinary luxuries are necessary to happiness." The others of their party were rising to go down to the ballroom. "How much less would I ask to be happy!" she murmured in a pitiful supplication. "How much less! Only to be free!"

Mrs. Goddard called to them. "We don't get five minutes together, do we?" he complained ruefully. "Well, we may dance; come, let's make some of this happiness ours, just to see what it tastes like. You've never danced with me," he whispered. "Dance with me to-night, will you?"

She gave a little troubled laugh. "If you like."

When they swept together out on the floor it was not only the eyes of their own party that followed them. Tall as he was, Bryson moved at ease in the dance, and Mrs. Eliot, supported by his arm, floated.

"Isn't it a delight?" he murmured. And answering she did not speak; just her half-troubled little laugh made response.

The yachting party went aboard late, tired and happy, to supper and to bed. Before daybreak Mrs. Eliot, dozing, heard the whip of the screw on the water. At breakfast they were among the Cheneaux Islands for muscalonge.

The men stripped to fishermen's togs for the trolling. Just before they took the rowboat Bryson tapped at the door of Mrs. Eliot's stateroom. "I wish you would keep these for me while I am out, will you?" he asked,

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handing her a package of papers wrapped in a manila covering and tightly clasped in rubber bands. "I should hate to lose them."

"Certainly."

"Do you know what they are?" he asked, good-naturedly, running the tops of the documents under his thumb like a pack of cards.

"Insurance policies?" she asked, at a venture.

"That's a new name for them, but not a bad one. They insure you against everything on earth, except death."

"Oh!"

"Don't leave them around your stateroom, for they're not registered."

"Have they a money value?"

"Well, rather."

"Oh, I shall carry them where I carry my money, then."

"Where's that?"

"Here," she answered, laying her hand with perfect simplicity on her heart.

"They're lucky," said he reflectively, "to be so well taken care of. But your heart is big," he added, with a smile. "And, by-the-way, I want you to pay attention now, dear one; mark what I say, will you? There are eleven of them. If anything happens to me, they're yours. Do you understand? All yours; you are just to keep them."

"Oh, nothing is going to happen to you," she said, clutching at his coat fearfully. "Nothing shall happen. If you go into danger, I go with you. Do you understand? If one of us dies, both—do you under-

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stand?" she asked, frantic in appeal. He laughed and tried to catch her in his arms, but she was as shy as a humming bird.

"Do you mean to say you would die with me?"

"Yes."

"Leave Ruth?"

"Oh, that is cruel to suggest. But I would give my life for either of you; can't you understand?" She trembled.

"I think so. There's no danger, dear one. Sometimes a fisherman gets ducked and loses his valuables, that's all."

"Are you sure there's no danger?"

"Sure. Kiss me good-bye."

"No," she bubbled, fighting away, "I can't kiss you. But," she snatched one of the gloves from his hand, "I'll kiss this," she laughed, putting it to her lips, "and bid it bring my dear, dear doctor back to me. Good-bye, now. Run along," she whispered, arching her neck and brows and shaking the package at him.

Mitchell's voice rang down the companionway. "Oh, doctor, hang it! get a move on, won't you!"

"Coming!" cried Bryson, kissing the rescued glove and backing away. She protested in pantomime against his holding it to his lips; then as he reached the cabin stairs her head nodded and she disappeared.

For some reason the muscalonge refused that morning to bite. At eleven o'clock the fishermen quitted the water with a despised string of pickerel and bass. Bryson took it philosophically, but Mitchell was annoyed, and his plans for the trout fishing were made

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immediate. He invited everyone in turn to go up with him to Steel River, but everyone in turn, except Mrs. Mitchell, absolutely declined to brave the mosquitoes and the flies.

"We want a few days at the Grand Hotel to rest up," declared Bryson. "This pace of yours is too fast, Ed."

"I'll tell you what," suggested Mitchell, finally, as they neared Mackinac. "I'll have Larry take Mrs. Mitchell and me up to Steel River to-night. You folks visit in Mackinac to-morrow and Friday and take the Duluth boat for the Soo Friday night. Larry will be back there Saturday morning with the yacht and bring you to Steel River after us. That will give you the magnificent scenery of the North Shore, and we'll be ready to come back with you when you reach the river. You've never been on Lake Superior, any of you, have you? I want to tell you it's a trip for a king."

"Fine!" exclaimed Mrs. Goddard. "Indeed, Mr. Mitchell, you have a great head. We'll have all the ride—"

"And our Mackinac visit," added Mrs. Eliot.

"And no mosquitoes—" put in the doctor.

"Then we can run right back to Grand Bay," continued Mitchell, "and you will see next week the prettiest yacht races ever run on the Lakes.

They parted at the wharf, Mitchell and his wife going to the yacht, the doctor and his friends to the hotel.

The morning brought the first bad weather of the trip; rain and a sweep of low clouds from the north-east; it brought, too, neuralgia to Mrs. Goddard. At

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breakfast Mrs. Eliot reported her unable to come down. The day wore with the storm. Bryson chafed not in the least. They sat part of the time with Mrs. Goddard, part of the time reading and talking before a log fire in a private parlor. He was brimming with energy and planning for the future and talking in low, earnest tones, wiping out difficulties and elaborating new departures for work at the College.

"The happiest day of my life, I do believe—and I've had some mighty happy ones with you!" he said to her that night, leaving her at her door.

"Oh, I have your package yet!" she exclaimed, putting her hand upon it. "Wait a moment till I can give it to you."

"No, keep it to-night. Put it under your pillow, and see what you dream. It will be as safe with you as with me. Good-night. May I kiss your hand?"

"If you like." He bent low over her fingers laid frankly on his own and kissed them twice.

Once in the night he was called to Mrs. Goddard, who was suffering, and after administering some medicine he sat for an hour at the fireplace in her parlor with Mrs. Eliot, whose rooms communicated. When Mrs. Goddard went to sleep he left.

Morning broke beautiful, with the wind shifting to the south and the doctor made all plans for a drive. Mrs. Goddard was better, but afraid to venture out. So with a basket luncheon brought out to the trap on the run by a wonderful man from the kitchen, Mrs. Eliot was helped in by the doctor and the two set out to do the island.

Bryson, along the road and through the woods and

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fields, took a multitude of pictures, and they brought up about noon at the Fort. The day was ideal. They wandered over the whitewashed precincts like children, prowling through old passageways, sunning themselves on the rotten parapets and day-dreaming above the magnificent panorama of the Straits. The driver brought out the hamper and an unexpected cooler of wine, deposited them under a maple tree and disappeared upon orders. She took off her hat, which he hung above their heads, pinned her skirt up a little and on the angle of a venerable rampart disposed the luncheon while he cut their initials, "H" for Harry and "H" for Helen, into a retaining beam.

"Doesn't it make a pretty monogram? Play you're seventeen and I'm nineteen," he said, while she, standing, watched him. "How old are you, dear one? I've never asked you."

"Twenty-seven."

"And I'm twenty-nine. That's why I love you, but you don't love me."

They lunched, talked, and found a grassy bank where she sat down. He threw himself at her side and told stories and planned for all the fun they would have on their Lake Superior trip; before they knew it the sun was descending. The trap waited for them under the arched gateway. At the hotel they found Mrs. Goddard up, but pale and wan looking, and seized with a sudden resolve. "I'm going home to-night," she said at dinner. "I'm sick, doctor, and you know you always say 'the place for a sick person is at home.' I'll go down to the Bay on the night train. It's only two hours and a half. You two go ahead on

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the yachting trip ; you must leave me out. If I should get another attack like that one yesterday I should go crazy."

"Oh, Mrs. Goddard," expostulated Mrs. Eliot, "surely you will be able to go to Steel River with us. You'll feel better just as soon as we get on the boat, I know. I always feel better travelling than I do at a hotel."

But Mrs. Goddard was resolute. The longer she sat the more evident it was that she ought not to try to go. She made a final appeal to the doctor. He told her frankly the sensible thing to do was to go home. Mrs. Eliot, who continually intervened, seemed to hope he would encourage Mrs. Goddard to go with them. Bryson, on the other hand, was quite easy about it, and gave Mrs. Goddard explicit directions for taking care of herself after she got home.

It was nearly eight o'clock when they rose from the dinner. "The Bear" was due to leave for the Soo at nine; the baggage had gone to the pier.

"Your ferry-boat leaves at ten o'clock; an hour after 'The Bear' pulls out," the doctor reminded Mrs. Goddard in the parlor while he buttoned his glove. They were waiting for Mrs. Eliot. She came in with her hat and wrap.

"You and I will walk down ahead to see the crowd and the unloading when 'The Bear' arrives," said Doctor Bryson. "I've ordered your carriage for a quarter of ten, Mrs. Goddard, and as we'll be gone when you go, I'll say good-bye until we join you next week at the Bay."

"Good-bye, doctor. Ever so sorry I couldn't go."

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"Really, ought any of us to go?" asked Mrs. Eliot, appealing to both of them. "If Mrs. Goddard is sick let us go down to the Bay to-night with her, doctor."

"Disappoint Mitchell after he has sent the yacht way back to the Soo after us?" exclaimed the doctor. "That would be shocking. Why, he's treated us like princes. It wouldn't do!"

"That's true; you must go," interposed Mrs. Goddard, with an invalid's privilege of insistence.

Mrs. Eliot's eyes wore an expression that could not pass unperceived. "I do not think we ought to. Indeed, I do not, doctor," she urged.

"Why, what on earth!" he exclaimed. "You wouldn't spoil our whole trip at this stage, would you?" he protested, with a hard look.

"You go, then," importuned Mrs. Eliot, "and let me take Mrs. Goddard home."

"But Mrs. Goddard doesn't need to be taken home, my dear," smiled the good lady, amiably.

"Come!" said the doctor to Mrs. Eliot, with quiet emphasis, "you're unnecessarily nervous. Let us start. We shall miss all the fun. Everybody's going to the boats already."

"Good-bye, dear," murmured Mrs. Goddard, kissing her, "you'll have a lovely time; run along like a good girl; don't mind me. I'm all right."

Mrs. Eliot stood bewildered. She tried to respond to Mrs. Goddard as the demonstrative lady embraced her, but when she turned to leave with Doctor Bryson she turned like one dazed.

CHAPTER XXI

NIGHT had fallen when they descended the porch of the hotel. In the zenith lingered a fading light shot out of the west, above a bank of heavy clouds. The air was humid and electrical; oppressive. On the Straits laden steamers moved like stately fireflies, noiselessly, and the village below blazed in evening finery. The bazaars, stripped of their fronts, opened upon the street, and upon each other. Sightseers thronged the sidewalks. On the primitive roadway cottagers in traps and buckboards and road-wagons rattled along, and bareheaded girls, behind curbed and docked horses spangled to the crupper, perched on carts of extravagant height and color and babbled recklessly. A double row of hacks and runabouts packed the market-place and toward the pier set a stream of travellers, idlers, porters and baggage-wagons. It was steamer night for the Buffalo boat, the Georgian boat, the Grand Bay boat; for "The Bear," Duluth, up; "The Arctic," Chicago, down; and in and out between the big steamers plied the night boats for St. Ignace, for around the island, for the moonlight dance and for the ferries to the mainland and the upper peninsula. On the excursion boats mandolin trios played Sousa's airs and rival harp and violin combinations offered two-steps and waltzes timed to the heavy respirations of the incoming steamers blurred by the bantam spank of the screws

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of the little boats and the hoarse splutter of the big ones backing and pushing their leviathans to dock.

Clinging with mechanical tenacity to his arm, elbowed by baggage-laden women, crowded by tackle-laden men, by runners piloting their customers and travellers tearing at big heaps of satchels, Mrs. Eliot kept Doctor Bryson's step and listened unreplying to his running talk and comment. His humor flowed in every step he took, in every tone of his voice and in every turn of his eye. With the queer little panic she had fallen into at the hotel checked, he made it his art to conjure his companion into good spirits again, for happiness such as his must mate or die.

"Come on through this crowd," said he, pushing steadily ahead. "We'll get out to the end of the pier, where we can see without being shoved about. "What's the matter with you? You're shivering."

"No."

"You look wild," he persisted, halting to bend over her. "What's the matter?"

"Doctor, could you give up this trip to-night?"

"Give up this trip to-night? What do you mean?"

She made no answer, but clinging to his arm, looked out on the water.

"Why, Helen, this is the first play-spell I've ever had in my life since I went to work. By Heaven, it seems to me there's something coming to me in life after a while. I'm not looking for a chance to give up any trip like this. I'd like more such."

"Then do you go alone. Let me go back with Mrs. Goddard to-night."

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His voice grew hard as ice. "I thought we settled that at the hotel."

"I ought not to go."

"Why not?" he asked, with chilly patience.

"I ought not to go."

"That's like a woman. If you've a reason, give it; if you haven't one, for Heaven's sake, brace up."

"It's a dread; a foreboding."

"Humph! If I regulated my actions by dreads and forebodings—"

"Sometimes all a woman can do is to dread. I'm only a woman; you're a big, strong man."

"You stay with me, then, and you'll be all right. I'm running this affair. Enjoy yourself; let me look after the baggage." The hollow roar of a steamer whistle cut him off; they listened.

"That must be 'The Bear,'" he exclaimed. "It is 'The Bear,' by Jove, and she's on time. Look, there are her lights. You'll be over this in five minutes," he whispered, reassuringly.

"I wish I might."

He took her hand. "Why, hang it, you're as cold as ice; your voice is as dry as a husk. You're not sick?" he asked.

"I can't lie to you," she looked straight into his eyes. "I wish I could; I wish I were sick. Every step I've taken from the hotel has been torture. I've wished horses would run over me on the street; the earth would swallow me up; a steamboat would explode and kill me. Oh! doctor, doctor, can't you see—can't you see what I'm facing?"

"Control yourself. You used to be brave—"

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"Ah, brave! No, no, no," she shuddered, "not for that. If I am ever with you two days alone on that yacht I cannot save myself—I am lost!"

"You are hysterical."

"No; look in my eye. You've taught me what hysteria is. I'm not hysterical; I'm drowning."

The sudden hulk of the Soo boat loomed like a mountain beside them and glided, panting and hissing, past to its moorings. Passengers high on the deck swarmed like bees to the rail and a band played "El Capitan" march. A tribe of Shriners on excursion was on board and a crowd of them leaped upon the pier from the gangway ahead of the plank and poured into the crowd like noisy schoolboys.

"You're frightened to death, that's all," declared the doctor. "Listen, isn't that music fine? How that band plays. Stand by me. I live to protect you. My life—everything I have—is yours. I love you; I make no secret of it, do I? I've always loved you. I always shall. There's nothing on earth I ask but the privilege of marrying you if you will marry me. You won't have that now. You won't have a divorce. What will you do? Will you leave; cut loose from everybody with me? We'll start to-night. I'll go to the end of the world with you—anywhere on God's earth you say. That package you carry in your bosom is money, bonds, fifty-two thousand dollars. Say the word, and no eye that has ever seen our faces shall see them again. We will send for Ruth; she shall be with us; one of us. I'll tell her the story. By Heaven, Helen, I'm not ashamed of it. Haven't I been more of a father to her than her nat-

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ural father? Didn't I scoop death out of her throat with my own fingers? When she's a woman will she condemn me for doing what I've done for her; for loving her mother above every other woman; for throwing everything I have, everything I am, at her feet? Will she condemn me for that?"

"She could not condemn you; I could not—no one could condemn you."

"She couldn't ever live to condemn you. After all your sacrifice, your struggle to care for her as you've cared for her, if she could live to condemn you—" his words stung with anger—"she ought to have been left to rot with diphtheria."

"What will happen—what will happen," she asked, wildly, "when I condemn myself?"

"You shall not. You never shall condemn yourself. You can't, till you condemn me. And when you close my eyes you won't condemn me; I'll die with your image in them."

"Don't blind me, don't blind me, when every drop of my heart's blood pleads for you."

"Listen to it, then, and come. It's an accident. We didn't will it, you nor I. If we've reached the river, let us cross it."

"Cross it, do you say? Cross it? Yes, if ever I set foot with you on this boat to-night I have crossed it. I could never struggle further. Tell me first, tell me now, doctor, you surely want me to cross it. Is there nothing in your heart that speaks for me? Oh, I know I am weak and wicked, or I shouldn't be here. Don't be angry if I falter on the brink. Can't you rest with me yet a while? Can't you be patient a little longer?"

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I know I'm all to blame. I've done you a fearful wrong. Don't say no—I have—but don't push me into the river. When I sink I drag you with me, darling, and I love you too much for that. God forgive my wicked heart, I love you."

His arm caught her waist and she felt its fearful strength sweep her like chloroform from her feet. He was bending above her; the wind was blowing wildly and the Shriner band dinned a mad tune in her ears. She heard, but caught through it all only one burning word: "Come! Come."

"No," she gasped. "No, darling, no!" She writhed in his grasp. Something wet and cold dashed into her upturned face. People all about began running, a confused mob of indistinct figures, out of a pour of rain. There was hurry, scramble, confusion on every side. The rain fell harder and a little girl, thrown like a chip out of the selfish, eddying crowd, running to where they stood, caught frantically at Mrs. Eliot's skirt.

"Mamma! mamma!" she cried, bedraggled and sobbing and panic-stricken in the deluge. "Are you my mamma?" she screamed, choking in the driving storm. "Oh, I can't find my mamma. I've lost my mamma." Before they could catch her or speak, she had darted away. The terrific chime-whistle of "The Bear," opening above, stunned them with its starting blast; the wind whipped a sheet of water about them. He pulled her hurriedly forward.

"Come, we must get aboard."

She fought him with her little strength of hands

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and feet as he urged. "I can't. Oh, Harry, I can't. You're killing me."

He straightened suddenly up; a blare of lightning revealed his face. His features set with rage as she stood—the rain beating her upturned eyes—resisting.

"You don't love me!" he cried, in a frenzy. "You never loved me. A woman that reasons doesn't know what love means."

He pushed her roughly away. She staggered, slipped and fell to her knees. A frightful crash of lightning split the night. The long pier, stripped of people, lay bare to the storm and the water swept it in driving torrents. He started away; hesitated; looked back; stopped. She did not cry nor scream. Her hands, clasped in rigid terror, seemed to stretch for help, but did not; her eyes, staring, seemed to see, but did not. He ran to her side. Again it was darkness and a raging of wind and rain and he caught her up. "Come back to Mrs. Goddard. Come!"

She struggled slipping to her feet; he could feel her breath fluttering and could remember a little bird fluttering so in his hand when he was a boy.

"I can't—see—" she faltered, in a broken stammer, as she stumbled at his side. "I—can't see."

"Who, in God's name, can see?"

They were passing the gangway, of the steamer. The plank was up. With a huge, hollow purr, like the pant of a great cat, the big boat was backing steadily away from the pier; backing away for the Soo, and from the horns of the Shriner band, snug within, came the easy, swinging rhythm of the "Mosquito Parade."

He half carried her to the street, got her under an

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awning, bribed a hackman to drive through the deluge to the hotel, and took her to Mrs. Goddard's room.

"Yes, we're back," he said, shortly, to Mrs. Goddard's open-mouthed amazement. "Mrs. Eliot changed her mind. Good-night."

The cab horses slipped and struggled down the hill again with him to the pier. The storm deepened in fury, but he gave it no heed.

CHAPTER XXII

ON the Monday following the gale that swept the lakes on the night of that parting, John Allison, in an office of the legal department of the East Side Railway Company, was dictating a despatch. Out of a litter of newspapers, letters and telegrams about him he made up, after many alterations, this message:

"To Mrs. J. F. Goddard, The Hemlocks, Grand Bay, Michigan.

"My attention has been directed to the following death notice, contained in the newspapers yesterday, Sunday, morning:

"ELIOT—On Friday night, at the residence of his mother, Mrs. J. Gordon Eliot, 1228 Forest Avenue, Evanston, Gregory Brewster Eliot, aged thirty-six years. Notice of funeral hereafter.

"A telephone message from C. W. King, manager of the Plankinton House, Milwaukee, informs me that Henry E. Bryson is lying there ill with pneumonia. I go to him at noon. Notify Mrs. Eliot.

"JNO. C. ALLISON."

The affixing of his own careful signature to that telegram was the last thing John did before taking the train. It was two o'clock when he reached Milwaukee, greatly perturbed. From the hotel manager he learned the bare facts of the breaking down of the steamship "Arctic" Friday night in the middle of the

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lake; how it had been forced, by stress of weather Saturday night, to put into Milwaukee for harbor; how the passengers for Chicago, with the exception of Doctor Bryson, who had come to the hotel sick, had been forwarded by train.

The meeting of the two young men, the well one and the ill one, was more than sympathetic; it was affectionate. Bryson greeted John with a smile. "They're trying to make me believe I'm sick," he began, pausing occasionally. "There's an amiable old spider of a doctor here, a fine old fellow, John—the house physician—he's taking good care of me; said he'd heard of me. He showed me an old fashioned lancet, John," panted Bryson, with a strange excitement over the trivial incident, "that he took a cinder out of Long John Wentworth's eye with when he was coming back from the Frémont Convention in 1856." Bryson shifted uneasily as he smiled and attempted again to speak. "He tells me my left lung is pretty well caked to-day, but the constitutional symptoms don't alarm me. His views on the treatment coincide exactly with mine; that's reassuring."

"Good. Now don't tire yourself out talking, doctor. I shall hear it all right. Just lie easy and rest."

"A moderately warm room, John, and an absolutely stationary temperature—"

"I understand."

"Champagne brandy for the heart. The difficulty is to keep the temperature right between midnight and morning, and to get the right brandy. It is the heart must do the work. You must push it, John, all the time with grape alcohol—understand?"

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"Perfectly."

"Have I ever explained to you the chemical differences between the alcohol of the grape and the grain alcohol?"

"Fully, fully."

"Sir?"

"Fully, doctor, fully."

"What was I saying? It is curious how I got caught here." He raised himself on his elbow. "You know Ed Mitchell's crack boat; his pet, 'The Arctic,' John, broke—a—nurse, will you give me a drink of water?" He lay back and closed his eyes. They opened again with a wandering stare. "The artery forceps, please," he said, in a quieter tone. Then his eyes closed. "Thank you," he muttered. "He's a bleeder, gentlemen; he's certainly a bleeder."

More than his feverish talk, more than his carefully labored respiration, it was his eyes that shocked John. Terribly large and bright and restless, they seemed not merely to see; they blazed with thought and understanding. Eyes, brain, mind and excellence leaped together in one great fire of unreason.

Allison went downstairs sick at heart. The room clerk handed him a despatch. It was from Mrs. Goddard.

"Mrs. Eliot," she telegraphed, "is in a highly nervous condition. I have told her of her husband's death, but not the doctor's illness. For special reasons I do not want to tell her unless imperative. Keep me posted frequently."

He hunted up the manager and they went together to the office of Doctor Spruance, the house physician.

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At five o'clock John sent a message to Mrs. Goddard.

"Symptoms this afternoon less favorable. I should inform Mrs. Eliot."

When he went upstairs the nurse told him the doctor was dozing. He looked in again later. The same exhausted smile greeted him, the eyes grown bigger under the shaded light, and with the rising fever an increased restlessness. At eleven o'clock the house physician, bearded, bent, and superbly confident, scuttled in like a beneficent old pirate, scanned with a piercing eye the preparations for the night, gave his orders like a field marshal and by his very decision and presence dispelled uneasiness and gloom. At midnight, after a final consultation with the sick man, whose head seemed to clear magically the minute his case was discussed, the house physician noiselessly took his departure, the nurse noiselessly made her final preparations and John sat noiselessly down for the watches of the night.

It was a hard night. Morning, the shortened respiration, the sunken eye, the impassive fever thermometer told the story. John telegraphed Grand Bay early.

"Have you told Mrs. Eliot. He has expressed a wish to see her," said he, in his message. "Condition critical."

Noon brought a telegram from Mrs. Goddard: "We leave with Mr. Mitchell for Milwaukee at once."

Growing apprehension put John at studying timetables and steamboat schedules. They could not possibly arrive, the agents told him, before Wednesday

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morning. At one o'clock came a telegram from Edward Mitchell.

"Mrs. Eliot's party are with us on 'The Sweetheart' en route Milwaukee. We should reach Northern Steamboat dock not later than ten p. m. Have carriages there early. By all means, if not already in charge, secure Doctor Spruance. If he so desires, wire my own physician, Parks Ingram, of Chicago, and ask him to come up for consultation. The St. Paul people will make a special run. Call on our people at Milwaukee for anything you need."

Ed Mitchell's pretty yacht did even better than her promise. Captain Larry made that run the run of her life. He made a supreme effort, for Captain Larry was an Irishman and his charge was a distressed woman, and a lovely one. St. Gall's bells were just chiming eight o'clock when "The Sweetheart" whistled for the Northwestern Bridge. The carriages, warned by the harbor master's telephone, were at the dock waiting when the yacht steamed up; thirty minutes later John in the hotel was called down to meet them. Mrs. Eliot, Ruth and June, marshalled by Mrs. Goddard, were there. "The Mitchells will be here in a few minutes," she said.

John greeted Mrs. Eliot. She stood between Mrs. Goddard and June. "Dear Mr. Allison, how is he?" she asked, brokenly.

"He's a little, just a little better to-night," John replied, carefully taking her hands; they were clammy. "He knows you are coming," he added, floundering, "for he has asked again and again for you. Go right

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to your rooms; they are next to his, and I'll get Doctor Spruance right up to see how soon you can go in."

Mrs. Goddard took her arm and put her, with Ruth and June into the elevator. "I'll follow right along," she said. "How is he?" she whispered, after the car had gone. John shook his head. "Temperature a hundred and six. His breathing is something frightful."

"What on earth has happened between them, John? He brought her back from the boat Friday night distracted. John, you musn't repeat this, but—" her voice sank for a moment to a frightened whisper. He started, and looked at her, white and serious. "That's why I didn't want to tell her," she resumed, wiping her eyes, "for fear it would make her worse. Isn't it terrible? And how did he come here sick with pneumonia?"

"I hardly know more than you. For some reason he took 'The Arctic' Friday night for Chicago. It was the night of the storm, you know. He stuck to the bridge the whole night with the first officer. Knowing he was a particular friend of Ed Mitchell's, the Captain didn't want to cross him."

"They have had a terrible quarrel. I hope it won't end here. And now her husband is dead! Lordy, Lordy, we've come so fast my head is whirling. John, is he going to die?"

"The old doctor says not. I don't know. Shall we follow them?"

Upstairs Mrs. Eliot and June were with Doctor Spruance in the hall. "Remember," he was saying to Mrs. Eliot, impressively, "you are going in to see a

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sick man. The slightest indiscretion on your part may be a fatal one. You must avoid exciting him. Go in now with Mr. Allison. I will follow; when I touch your shoulder leave quietly; do you understand, my child?"

"You are so good," she whispered to the short, bent old man. "So kind and so skillful, I know everything will be right. I will do exactly as you say. He has taught me how to go into a sick-room, doctor. You will save him?" she burst, in a sudden shock of sobs.

"I am doing everything I can to save him. If you break out like that in there just once," he answered, tartly, "you'll kill him."

She took the rebuke and pressed his hand. "I am ready."

The light was heavily shaded, and the nurse stood back of the bed in the shadow. He lay on his side, his eyes half closed, but the hardly audible rustle of her skirts caught his ear. He roused with feverish alertness. With eager, stretching steps, blunting on her heart the awful shock of his breathing, she made her way, with June's help, to his bedside and knelt. He looked intently into her eyes. "Dear one," she murmured. He raised his brows and they fell again. "She is not here," he panted.

"Not here?" she pleaded, trying to make plain her face.

"John has sent." His thin, queer tone dropped to huskiness. "Tell her I want to see her."

Her hands slipped over one of his and she kissed it in an agony; his ear caught her suppressed sob.

"Coughing." His brows drew down frowningly.

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"You have taken cold. Now, will you do as I tell you; will you?"

"Yes, yes."

"Take a teaspoonful of this brandy every hour—one teaspoonful. Drink as much water as you please before taking it—but none after. It will reduce—inflammation. For some coughs and sore throats—due to our lake breezes—it gives remarkable results."

"Do you not know me?" she whispered, pressing his hand.

"Perfectly. Listen. The books will tell you alcohol excites—inflammation and fever. I tell you it frequently allays both—say nothing about that," he muttered, drowsily.

"Oh, don't you know me, doctor?"

His eyes closed. She clasped his hand in a secret fright; the panting respiration of a sudden subsided; the eyeballs sunk within their sockets. With a scream she sprang up. "He's dying. You're deceiving me. I know! He's dying!" Her voice rang frantic twice with his name. "Harry! Harry!"

They jumped about her. Bryson from his stupor started into ghastly life. His eyes opened, and as a dreamer wakes he saw her outstretched arms. He struggled to rise. "Ah, Helen!" he cried, like a sinking man.

She threw herself beside him, caught his head in her bosom, cradled it on her breast, and savage with unrestraint kissed his vacant eyes. Until she would they could not part them. She laid him, fainting, back like a child, and he whispered, frightened, she must not leave him. She put kisses on his hot forehead,

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hushed him with a loving breath and knelt till he grew at last quiet.

Not even Doctor Spruance would venture to predict the sequel. But Bryson took the crisis and took the collapse asking only for her; the convalescence, still asking for her.

"You can't kill me," he said, faintly smiling early one morning at John. "What's been happening since I've been sick? Is this Monday?"

John looked long at him before he said, slowly, "A great deal has happened, doctor. Mrs. Eliot's husband is dead."

"Dead, John?"

"Dead and buried—two weeks ago."

After a moment he spoke. "She knows, of course?"

"Yes." John took from his pocket a clipping. Supporting himself weakly on his elbow, Bryson, gaunt-eyed, read. "Dead," he muttered. He lay for a moment with his eyes closed, breathing heavily. "John, ask her if she won't come to me."

"She isn't here, doctor."

"Not here?"

"She went to Chicago yesterday on some matters she had to see to," said John, rather awkwardly.

"Chicago?" echoed Bryson, faintly.

"We expect to take you down in a few days, anyway, you know; just as soon as you're strong enough to be moved. By the way, she gave me a sealed package of yours. She said you would know what it was. She had no opportunity of returning it, and asked me to take care of it. I have it safe."

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Bryson wavered, trying to collect his thoughts.
* What did she leave here for? "

"There were some business matters, Harry."

"She has no business matters."

"She must have had."

"Did she say so? "

"I assumed so."

"You don't know anything about it?" observed Bryson, weakly, eyeing him.

"I don't know very much, for I gave it no thought. You know the rest of them all went down last Thursday. When Mrs. Eliot said she had better go, I assumed that it was business of some kind that was taking her."

"Taking her on Sunday?" asked Bryson. It made John uncomfortable. He did not cease to explain, but he had already ceased to convince.

It had been his custom during Bryson's convalescence to go to Chicago every morning, returning in the evening. That morning he left with the promise that he would return early enough to take dinner with the doctor in his room; the sick man was beginning to sit up and to know appetite. A day earlier such a promise would have made Bryson smile one of his old happy smiles. But this day it brought only mechanical thanks. John went away with the feeling of having managed badly, yet without knowing precisely how he could have managed well. He was a lawyer, but not a diplomat. He had concealed a secret without concealing the effort to do so.

It was ten o'clock when he reached his Chicago office, and his manner of despatching business indi-

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cated something on his mind more pressing than what was on his calendar. Contrary to his invariable custom of taking luncheon down town, John, after getting Doctor Hoxie at the Laflin College on the telephone and making an appointment with him at the house for two o'clock, went down to Miss June's. Mrs. Goddard, June, Mrs. Eliot and Ruth were at table when he arrived.

"He's better," announced John, briefly. "Weak as a cat, though; it's pulled him down terribly. He can't sit up two minutes at a time yet. It will be a week before we can move him. How are you to-day, Mrs. Eliot?" he asked, anxiously.

"Pretty well, thank you."

"Doctor Hoxie will be here at two o'clock."

"He has been very kind," said Mrs. Eliot, gently.

"Well he may be; Harry Bryson has made him all he is; and he knows it. When I apologized for dragging him so far he said he would come down here on his knees to serve any friend of Doctor Bryson's. I like that kind of gratitude."

"Doctor Bryson certainly has the faculty of attaching his friends to him," ventured Mrs. Goddard.

"It's no wonder," interposed June, "when you think of the trouble he takes to do things for other people."

A pained expression passed over Mrs. Eliot's face. Mrs. Goddard shut June off with a look, and the talk became an effort to support a livelier topic. Doctor Hoxie was announced before they rose from the table. When he left the house with John Allison it was nearly three o'clock. Mrs. Goddard had retired for her

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beauty sleep. Ruth had gone with June to market and Mrs. Eliot sat by the window in her room. The day was mild, with just the merest breath of air through the casement; a dreamy September day. She reclined with her hands limply open on the chair arms and her head back.

She had heard the rumble of carriage wheels on the street without thought of them. She heard, without heeding, the front door below open to a pass key and close, and sat motionless as before. But for her wide-open eyes looking out into the sky she might have been asleep. If there was a breath on the stairs, a step slower or more uncertain than those familiar to her ears, they went unnoticed. A few minutes later not even the tall, gaunt figure of a man in her doorway, enveloped in a pull-down cap and a huge ulster, stirred her reverie.

"Helen!" She started and clasped the chair arms as if she heard a ghost.

"Who called me?" she asked, trembling, wide-eyed.

"Have you forgotten even my voice?"

With a cry she put out both her hands and ran forward. An ottoman between them tripped her and she stumbled and almost fell in front of him. "Doctor, doctor! How did you come here? What have you done?"

"Why did you leave me yesterday?"

"You are faint and trembling, doctor. Come to the couch. Why have you left your bed and endangered your very life like this?"

"He is dead, Helen. You are free. You left me."

"Oh, no."

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"Now that you are free—have I lost everything?"

"No, no. Everything I have and am, is for you—everything."

"Did I dream when I was sick," he muttered, sinking from her arms upon the couch, "that you called my name, and kissed me, and said you would not leave me?"

"You did not dream it," she murmured, beside him.

"And this is you and I now? Do I wake now?"

"It is indeed I, doctor."

"And you do not kiss me?"

With a hushed moan she threw her arms around him and smothered his reproaches.

"This sickness I have been through," he said at last, struggling to steady himself, "sometimes takes men's minds. Since I have begun to get well there seems some mystery about me. Since I have been strong enough to notice, everyone has acted strangely. It is a bad sign when a man's friends all go mad. I've sense enough left to know that. A man should blow his brains out then before they lock him up. I'll never die in a mad-house, Helen. Tell me, if you have any mercy, am I insane? Are you all hiding something from me? Why does everyone act so queerly?"

"You are too sick to talk or worry, my darling. I may call you that, Harry?" she whispered, hiding her eyes on his cheek. "It is not you, darling; it is not you. It is poor I who am causing all this trouble. In trying to keep it from you we have done worse than if we had told you. I am not very well, that's all. But I shall be soon, and I only want you to get well. If

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in trying to keep away from you for a while—we all thought it was best—I have made you expose your life and you should die!” she raised her hands despairingly. “If you should die, is there no death for me? I could stand every sorrow now but that—to lose you. I cannot stand that. Do you think it is only you that can love?” Her hands caught around his neck as she looked into his face. “Only you that can hunger and thirst?” She drew him like a reed to her, kissing his hair and eyes. “Some day you will know better. You must lie down, you poor, poor boy.” Her fingers—gentle, restless, sensitive fingers—crept over his forehead and eyes and lips as he held her in his arms.

“If I can only get well and strong again, so I can love you,” he muttered, “only to atone for my cruel selfishness.”

“Poor, sick boy; you must lie down!”

“First tell me why you are not well, dear one. I am closest to you. I must be your physician. You must tell me what your trouble is so I can relieve it. Don’t be afraid to trust your secrets to me. Whatever you suffer, I suffer.” He tried to rise, but fell back. “Give me some water, will you, Helen?” he asked, pointing to the pitcher on the table. “I’m miserably weak.”

She rose, took a step forward, hesitated strangely, put out her hands in front of her and stepped again. Supporting his head on his hand, he did not at first perceive her efforts to reach the table. When he looked up she was past it, feeling with her hands.

“Helen!” he cried, struggling to his feet. She

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turned with a startled exclamation and her outstretched hand swept a vase of flowers from the table with a crash. "What is the matter?" he asked, frantically. "Can't you see? Is this what you are keeping from me. You are blind!"

CHAPTER XXIII

GREENISH with pallor and faint he led her to the chair at the window. Controlling his throat with a painful effort, he tried to say, "Close your eyes. Look down." But his tongue dried and his mouth parched with the words. "Have you pain?" he asked, pressing first above one eyeball and then the other with the forefinger tips.

"No pain whatever," she answered, trustingly confident. "I told them I should be all right when you could care for my eyes. Only I wanted to keep it from you till you were strong."

"Not knowing that these few days might be the difference between sight and blindness. How long has this been?" he faltered, still feeling the tension with his skeleton fingers.

Her voice dropped. "Since the night of the storm, dear one, at Mackinac."

His hands fell upon her neck. "Is this the price you pay for my accursed brutality?" he asked, slowly. "Of all punishments—was there none for me but this?"

"It is not your punishment, dear one. It is mine."

He felt distractedly about on his breast. "I must have an ophthalmoscope. I must look at your eyes." He pointed across the room. "Can you see that picture over there?"

"No."

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"Can you see my fingers?" She shook her head.
"Do you see the window, Helen," he asked, painfully.

"Dear, I see light there."

"Has your vision failed every day since you were first affected?"

"Listen; don't suffer for me. I shall be better; indeed, I shall. That terrible crash of lightning—do you remember—it seemed to blind me. In the morning when I opened my eyes everything was hidden in a fog. I thought it was a fog until Mrs. Goddard told me there was none; that she could see everything. But the fog did not lift from my eyes and I knew I must wait till you could help me—if you would. I was afraid, sometimes, you might not help me," she whispered. "But even if you did not—I knew I should love you, blind, dear heart."

"Such a wrong as this will never be forgiven," he muttered, his features set in vacancy. "Do not speak. It never can be; it is too frightful."

"I have no wrong to forgive. If I had, my love would swallow up blindness for you, if only," she trembled, "you would still be kind." He kissed her solemnly.

"Come to my room. I am a coward," he choked, his damp hand in hers. "I am afraid to look. If you go blind, I'll prick my own eyes. Come."

"No," she breathed, supporting him as he guided her; "no, I need your sight, you need my strength; we will help each other."

They walked, one weak, one sightless, into his office-room. He put her into a chair, and steadying as best he could his own uncertain steps, fixed his light, dark-

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ened the little apartment, burnished the mirror of his ophthalmoscope and placed her in front of him. She put her gentle hands upon his shoulders. "Harry, dear heart of mine, I love you. That has been my only wickedness. Since I saw you that first day, young and strong and generous, good, I loved you. I struggled; I couldn't help it—I loved you. Tell me, Harry," her hands drew convulsively upon his shoulders, "tell me before you look, before you know—can you love me if I am to be blind? I dare not let you look," she cried. "I dare not let you know. How can you love me if I am forever blind? And if you forsake me—"

He folded her in his arms; their tears fell together. When they could control themselves he placed her in position and adjusted the mirror disc steadily on her eye. The mighty instinct of healing asserted itself once more and strengthened him. He closed the distance until their faces touched and threw the dazzling rays of the glass unflinching upon her retina.

If one in this life may look into the soul of another it is the oculist who pierces the heart of the eye with that light which, shot quivering back, lights his own. To bare the mystery of the divinest and tenderest of created things; to look from capillary to vein; vein to artery, artery to macula, to choroid, to cup; to that mute sensor of the brain, of form, thought, life itself—the optic nerve: to contemplate thus, alive and in its very function, the human eye must always inspire awe. But if the eye bared to one's own be a woman's eye, a woman dearer than very life—what may the inspiration be?

Patiently and long he studied, and with delicate

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questioning and artful scrutiny and the instant calculation of trained faculties, steadily built up his diagnosis.

Clasping his hand as he drew back and pushed away the light, she whispered, "Tell me. Don't be afraid of the truth."

"How can you believe me when I do tell you," he responded with some of the deadly weight lifting from his breast. "What I most dreaded is not there. There is no glaucoma, my darling."

"None?"

"No trace of a visible lesion in either beautiful eye. Your eyes appear absolutely healthy and normal." With the thankfulness that she tried to utter her caressing hands felt the sweat that beaded his forehead; from her girdle she drew a slight film of a handkerchief and wiped it away.

"It seems impossible to realize you cannot see," he continued, sorely perplexed. "Your organs of sight are perfect. If my own wretched skill counts for anything we must think back of the optic nerve for this trouble. This is why Hoxie can make nothing of it; he knows nothing of it. It is my shame. The shock of that night has stunned some impalpable sense nearer the unknown, nearer the brain itself, than we can see. My Helen, my darling, oh, my queen, for this wrong I offer you my life. Believe me, trust me, and God helping me you shall see again. If I faint you must not be frightened," he faltered. "A shock might—do you understand?"

With incredible strength she got him into the adjoining room and upon his bed before he lost con-

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sciousness. June found them there, Mrs. Eliot sitting with his head in her lap; somehow she had managed.

At five o'clock Hoxie came. He stayed to dinner and spent the night with Bryson, to watch, without at all letting him suspect it, for the collapse that he thought must surely follow the doctor's unheard of exposure. But Bryson's youth and strength and energy defied consequences, and with stimulants and sleep he mended like one that has work to do and must be about it.

The moment he was able to sit up he began to analyze the subtle malady which, in clouding Mrs. Eliot's sight without a discoverable lesion, offered so few assailable points. Doctor Hoxie was at his call continually, and before the sick man left his bed his campaign had been laid out and was being fought. In his bitter self-reproach he had told her he should never again speak of what was nearest his heart until he had given her back her sight. "Now I shall know," he had said, "whether I have only the brutality to shatter without the skill to restore. If I cannot save you," he had vowed, "I will never touch an eye again." Weeks lengthened into months while he bent every resource of his skill upon the baffling problem. She had one day said—she whose concern hovered always over him—who, sightless, saw better the crushing of his spirit than those that could daily question his reticent features—she had told him he must go back to his lectures; but he said he could not, and when she pleaded he broke down utterly. He said he could not; and she realized at last that it was true. He came insensibly to lean more and more on her; clung closer to her, hid nothing

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of all he could confide from her, and tried to hide but one thing—the sting that defeat renewed every day in his heart. But she saw even that, and for her own helplessness had only the sweetest reflections.

“When I think, dear one,” she would say, his head upon her breast, “of my captivity until then, and my blessed freedom since to love you, how *can* I be anything but the happiest woman in the world?” And upon her face, before so resolute and quick and girlish, grew another sweetness—the gentle sunshine that limns the features of the blind.

With him the impatience of continued worry settled into a dogged courage, which, exhausted at night with failure woke new in the morning with expedient and hope. “We must win,” he would say, kissing her fondly. But she would fondly ask, “Have you not already won? Are we not free?”

If he saw that her instinct penetrated his forebodings he painted new masks upon his grief to deceive her with play of light-heartedness. That Ruth might be always near, a governess was brought into the house to take charge of her studies, and Ruth, companion of her mother’s blindness, grew to womanhood—if womanhood means thoughtfulness and unselfishness—before her years. So, indeed, to girls like Ruth, it does mean these. At ten they already know all of womanhood except its joys and sufferings: something must be left for to-morrow.

He made, after a time, a pretence of going down occasionally to his office, but his practice was turned away. He had said that while hers remained sightless he would not touch an eye, and he would not. Hoxie

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was installed in his elaborate college quarters, and Bryson, thin and feverish, called sometimes to act in consultation with his junior. But away from her, he was studying always or sitting at the club alone lost in a deep chair looking out upon the lake; a silent man, shunning companionship, absorbed in thought. He still kept track of the clinics. Hoxie had his orders to fasten every case that turned up of hysterical amblyopia, and Bryson devoured them greedily as they came along only, when he had helped them, to turn away with the quiet despair that marked his face. Those in the city highest in his profession who had their hints of the desperate case he was struggling with, likewise apprised him of such cases as fell into their hands; and he was made to feel in his loneliness and despair that he had a few friends that did not forget.

Helen was never for half a day left without an evidence that she was of his thoughts. It might be a cutting of flowers, a bunch of grapes, only a package of chocolate. It was often a ring at the telephone; he loved to call her up to ask an answer to some absurd conundrum or to give her a news bulletin. It might be the result of an election or the death of a royal personage, or the details of a round in a notable prize fight, a sport of which he professed to believe her fond. To relieve the monotony of the telephone calls, Jim would arrive all the way from the College to bid her be ready to drive at four o'clock; or he would bring tickets for a matinee at which Ruth and her mother were to meet him. Or best tonic of all, it was at the most unlooked for hour, his own distinctive entering—nobody could deceive her on his coming—and his

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springing bound, two steps at a time, on the stairs. For herself she was happy; in secret it was only for him that she grieved.

One Sunday morning in her mother's apartments Ruth, sitting on his knee pulling, while he talked, at his hair, gave a cry.

"Oh, doctor!"

"What's the matter?"

"Here's a gray hair—two of them!—three!"

"Can you see so well?" he asked gently; and Ruth rebuked hid her eyes on his shoulder.

Not long afterward Doctor Bryson came home half sick. He had taken cold, he said, and would be all right in the morning. It was the first time they had ever known him to complain. He did not go down town, but came to her room to sit with her. She could not see that his eyes were congested; but his hands were cold.

"You are worrying about something," she said.

"No."

"Yes."

"Honestly not."

"What has happened?"

"Nothing much. Oh, by the way, I've resigned."

"Resigned?"

"Day before yesterday."

She could not hide the shock. He made light of the matter. "I've been overworking since I was sick. I need a rest," was all he said. Tears filled her eyes.

"Does Mr. Allison know it?" she asked.

"No."

"Does June?"

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"No."

"What will they say?"

"What need they say?"

"Loving you as they do—to see you throw away the highest honor in your profession. The prize that any oculist in the world would be proud to hold. Oh, doctor, doctor. Who will your successor be?"

"I don't know. Kurd, I guess."

She could not control herself. He held her in his arms. "It is I who have brought this calamity," she stammered at last.

"Why calamity, dear heart?"

She caught at his arms. "Am I still to ruin your life?"

"No, I have ruined yours," he replied, quietly.

"I will never live to be a lifelong drag upon you," she sobbed.

"You can never die without me; I promise you that."

"It is because of my eyes that you are sick and worried. I know why it is."

"No."

"Oh, why will they not see?"

"They'll never right by worrying about them, darling."

"I worry about you," she whispered, hiding her face on his neck, "not about my eyes."

"I thought I knew something about sight," he muttered. "I don't; it's a farce to pretend it. I am broken. I cannot tell whether I can ever give back what I have robbed you of. Knowing that, can you marry me?"

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"You have not robbed me of my sight; it was an accident or a punishment. You have given me all the sunshine that has ever come into my life. If I never see again I shall die blessing your name. I loved you when I had no right to—"

"Do not say so!"

"I let myself wickedly grow into your life when it was wrong for me to do it; now my punishment has broken your heart. I am blind now, perhaps forever. I release you, Harry. You should not have a blind wife. You need never marry me."

"Only shame has kept me every day from asking you, my darling, to let me marry you. Will you let me?"

"Are you sure you know your own heart?" she faltered. "Knowing I am blind, can you marry me?"

"I ask nothing more on this earth."

It was long before she spoke. She opened her eyes wide upon his face and her hands slipped about his neck. "Then in God's name, dear one, let me be your wife, and blind though I am, you shall be rewarded for all your goodness or I will die to release you."

But having so far forgotten herself, Helen Eliot—becoming again a free agent—demurred with a woman's promptitude at appointing the day. He asked for the very next; she pleaded for at least two months. They compromised, late, and to her great horror, on two weeks. When John was told he asked for only one privilege: that of supplying the minister. "I got him in a damage case," explained John to them, with interest and emotion. "He has had trouble and I think he will do," and John's minister did, indeed,

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prove to be a man of sorrows. Cast upon the lee of penury by a strenuous boulevard congregation, Mr. Carey, starving meanwhile modestly, was awaiting on a side street the Master's call. He had a plump, gray little wife, who on their starvation diet still burst through waists and sleeves—but what cannot a good woman do? She worried over her uncommon assimilation, but the less they had to eat the rounder grew Mrs. Carey's shoulders, and she was, in the end, forced to attribute her flesh to the impurities in Chicago drinking water.

Her husband, not satisfied with being stoned by a body of prosperous church trustees, had shortly afterward fallen foul of one of John's trolley cars, and his demoralization had become complete. After his encounter with the brethren in the business meeting the unlucky divine had conceived so wretched an idea of his own worth that the thought of making a claim against the street railway company did not occur to him. John's satellites laid the facts before the official head of the Claim Department, and the head, viz., Mr. Allison, expressed a desire to meet so phenomenal a man. He not only made Mr. Carey's acquaintance, but loved him at once.

When the great day that had been appointed at Miss June's was but one week away, John brought his find, starved and kindly, over to the house to meet those whom he was to join in holy wedlock, and, leaving, the stranger had breathed out of his pitying heart a little prayer over Helen Eliot's sightless eyes—and for that Bryson loved him.

Nothing then would do but that Mrs. Carey should

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come over, too. One night the little gray lady came in a basque made for her when she was young and slender, and she crept pretty nearly out of it into Helen's heart with a story.

"You know," she whispered over on the sofa, while at the other side of the room Mr. Carey was answering some inquiries of John's concerning the position of his young successor in the Boulevard pulpit on the authorship of the ten commandments. "You know," whispered Mrs. Carey, eagerly, as if it were a real ice cream secret, "we live right next door to Madame Laferté's."

"You do?" asked Helen, squeezing her roly-poly hand in great surprise. Happy people can always get up an interest even in directories and street numbers and such things. "Why, she is making my dresses."

"I know it, dear; it's about that. Her sister, you know, Aggie Lafferty, is her head seamstress."

"Is she?"

"They have eighteen sewing girls—"

"Just think of it."

"And Aggie works so hard and is such a good girl. They had a distressing time getting started, but now they are prosperous," sighed Mrs. Carey. "We have known them two years; they are Catholics," she added, lowering her voice. Helen only squeezed her hand sympathetically; under the circumstances it seemed the best thing to do, for it might mean "How nice," or, "This is simply dreadful," whichever way you took it. "Two years ago, when Aggie was working her finger-tips off to keep soul and body together, her eyes gave out. She began to go blind," faltered Mrs. Carey,

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feeling suddenly conscious, "and whom do you think she went to? Doctor Bryson! Yes. He worked with her three whole months—she had to stay nearly all that time in a dark-room; but he cured her completely. They lost all their trade, because she couldn't work and they hadn't any money. Oh, they had a hard time. But now she makes these grand party dresses that cost two and three hundred dollars. And when she offered to pay him, dear—he must be a very good man; I don't see how he could *ever* do anything wrong—he wouldn't take a cent for all his trouble, because he saw one day how worn her shoes were and knew they were so poor—" She squeezed Helen's hand and Helen squeezed her hand; it seemed the only thing to do.

"And now—she is making your wedding dress all *herself*, and she ran over day before yesterday to tell me that they were making such beautiful gowns for a lady that was bl—having trouble with her eyes. And I told *her* Mr. Carey was going to perform the ceremony and that he had met the lady and that she was going to marry Doctor Bryson! Oh, Mrs. Eliot; when I told her she burst into tears and said if that wedding dress was for his bride she would kiss every single stitch in it, and," Mrs. Carey trembled, "she is praying for you: and so are we, dear," and she squeezed Helen's hand very gently; but Helen asked to hear more about Aggie Lafferty.

So Mrs. Carey told her how this same wonderful and resourceful Aggie had intervened when the Careys were in the sorest distress to see whether she couldn't do something, and had persuaded Mr. Carey, as a reluctant concession to her sympathies, to carry in his

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pocketbook a tiny statue of St. Joseph, telling him it might bring him a new Presbyterian congregation. And how Mr. Carey shortly afterward, with St. Joseph asleep in his pocket, had been run down by a trolley car; but when he reproached Aggie for this lapse of her patron Aggie had contended that if it hadn't been for St. Joseph, all the same, he *might* have been *killed*. At which Helen laughed happily. There were so many, many inconsequent things to be happy over that night, and when Helen told Doctor Bryson about Aggie he vowed she should be invited to the wedding and bade June, under pains, look to it.

When all the stunning gowns were sent home and the bill from Madame Laferté's came, no charge could be found for the wedding gown itself: the dreamy gray gown lighting all over into gold and white: the gown that Helen, when she tried it on, stood in draped so queenly that June just dropped on her knees before her and clasped her in her arms.

So Madame Laferté was interviewed peremptorily by June concerning the omission, and answered, as dressmakers peremptorily will, that Aggie had put every stitch into that gown herself and that no bill for it would ever be rendered by any party of the name of Lafferty: it being solely the sentiments of the house towards the high contracting parties—one of whom had long ago cancelled the obligation by preserving the eyesight the gown was planned and executed with.

Somehow everything went to make it an intensely happy wedding. Not many were there, but they were true hearts—Doctor Hoxie and the closest friends on the staff. Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell could not be left out,

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and Ed Mitchell, satiny and starched and shaven, just from a special meeting of the trustees of the Laflin College for the Ear and Eye, brought an engrossed resolution from that body which, before the ceremony, he presented with a formal bow to Mrs. Bryson to be. And upon her request he read aloud to her and to all, wherein the trustees mindful, etc., etc., had declined to accept the resignation of Henry Elwood Bryson, M. D., Member of this and Fellow of that, but had, instead, granted him leave of absence for one year with the hope that when his private affairs permitted he would resume his duties—all duly signed and attested.

"Mrs. Mitchell has had the silversmiths working overtime since she heard of this thing," said Mr. Mitchell, confidentially to the bride-elect. "I don't know what she's got out of it. Whatever it is, it's in that trunk over there. But this resolution is *my* present to *you*."

Mary Montague, too, had her special offering for the occasion. To Doctor Bryson a miniature, such as royalty loves, of his bride; to her a miniature of her husband, done long ago, Mary said, for this very wedding day when it should come; for Mary's faith had been of the kind that sees through mountains. Nor did June, even, come empty handed—it was she who poured over the nuptials the libation of old maid's tears—and what tears make purer benediction?

CHAPTER XXIV

“**F**RANKLY,” wrote Doctor Bryson to John Allison from Vienna six months later, “we are very nearly the happiest people on this earth in spite of everything—strange tongues, strange beers, strange dishes, and the strange mist that still hangs over dear Helen’s eyes. Sometimes we think her sight improves. Again we know—or unhappily, John, I know—that hope once more has juggled us. Perhaps that is why the men on this side have a little disappointed me. It is my fault; I expected too much. An old fellow in Paris caught my heart with an unlooked for compliment. ‘My dear doctor,’ he asked, with a shrug, ‘why have you brought her over to me? I have just sent a woman, with as extraordinary a case of hysterical amblyopia, over to you.’ But he gave me no light: only believes as I believe—can’t help believing—that she will see yet. We are all gropers, John, though it is only among the elect that we admit it. Ruth likes everything immensely, and learns French and German fast. I show her as a star Jonnesco case; the scar on her neck is completely hidden by her hair. Helen would like to leave her in Munich for a year, as Mary M. wanted, if the two could stand the separation—which they can’t.

“And now I shall surprise you with the announcement that our stay over here is for very good and remarkable reasons to be cut short. They are not reasons

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that would appeal to a bachelor, so I shall not enter into them, but I shall be glad to have you instruct June to fire all boarders, positively, by the first of October. We want a quiet house this winter and I reckon you do, too. Mary M. we shall pick up in London on our way home and bring with us. That much we have settled without your intervention, my son. Helen and I are rejoiced that you are to be married in October; you two are missing everything by living at different ends of the earth. Art is all right, John, but the great art in this life, as far as I've studied life and art, is for two people that love each other to get together and to stay together—and to keep on staying together—in the quietest possible old-fashioned way. And I so told Mary Miniature Montague last spring in London. And she denied not, which I took as long ago as that for a hopeful sign for you."

John met the Brysons and his sweetheart at Quarantine. He couldn't wait for the landing to get sight of Mary M. who, wrapped in the most English of serges for a frame, peeped at him like one of her very own miniatures, only greatly excited.

When the party reached Chicago, June and Jim boarded the train at Sixty-third Street, and for a few minutes turned one sleeping car into a camp-meeting.

Ruth had grown tall and Viennese, and her braided hair, in the misty gray of the Lake Michigan landscape, looked wonderfully dark to June. Doctor Bryson's legs, too, appeared to have grown. Possibly it was the swelling tide in June's eyes that lengthened them as with the bit sleeker air of the travelled man he hurried forward, cavalier-like, to kiss June,

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whirl her and lead her back to where Helen, with a start and a flush and a face all life, held out her hands. June swept her up in a volume of skirts and sleeves and hat and tears and she disappeared. But she emerged from June's embrace, shook her feathers the least, the very least bit, and stood there again with all the demure charm that made June ache to muss her all over again. Then Mary Montague glided up to go through June's wringer, and John Allison intervened to ask June what she had for dinner, and for the second time that day was told it was none of his business—the first time being in the morning when he persisted in asking Mary M. why the Brysons had come home so all of a sudden.

The dinner table that night was like a banquet with everybody trying at once to make the speeches. After the dessert came and the wine had got entirely clear of the ice, the party had settled down to regular storytelling and June, who under a few sips of champagne was nothing if not cheerfully ferocious, asked Jim, behind her chair, to tell how Doctor Kurd had tried after Bryson left to take possession of the College office of the surgeon-in-chief of the eye and what had happened. Under the inspiration of the moment the details at the hands of James lost nothing. He told how carefully Doctor Kurd and the janitor had laid the plot. How Kurd's things had been moved in and Doctor Bryson's effects moved out, and how Doctor Hoxie had one morning accidentally discovered the situation, and without a word personally thrown the strenuous man into the receiving-room and had been prevented only by Jim from casting Kurd's ophthal-

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monometer and Javal arrangements after him. Doctor Bryson held his head in his hands over the table to laugh.

"Why, Doctor!" exclaimed June, leaning forward with an accusing glare, "what in the world's the matter with your head?"

"My head? Nothing, except it's a little congested just at present."

"Why, you're as gray as a badger!" declared June, looking around the table amazed. "Look at him!" Poor June; she hadn't been warned of the proscribed subject.

Helen took the shock without a sign. She had learned that with confidence final, love over all, she could still be happy even without sight. If more to fill life were needed, the awed happiness of the new mystery, soon to bind her closer to him, supplied it.

Other concerns, too, were crowding upon her. John and Mary Montague were to be married, and all sorts of doings were to be done in order that the miniature couple, as her husband called them, might be started aright. Ruth was to be put to school, a new home was to be looked up the coming year, and the doctor must be urged back to his work; that she knew was his only salvation.

Once, coming in to dinner, her husband found her alone in the dusk of the parlor at the piano. While, unheard by her, he stood listening, the chords she was breaking ran unexpectedly into "The Flatterer." It seemed to him she had never coaxed it so subtly from the keys. When she had done he spoke to her and bent softly on his knee for her kiss and told her surely she

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never had played so well. Then she laughed and wanted to ask something of him.

"What is it, darling?"

"If I should die, I want you to marry again—" He groaned a protest. "You know that, dear one," she continued, inflexibly. "But I don't want you ever to ask her," she whispered, "to play 'The Flatterer.' You won't, will you? Now don't make fun of me; promise."

"Yes, yes, I do promise," he laughed, clinging to her fingers.

"I want you to remember me by that. Never ask for it; but sometime—sometimes—you may hear it. I shall be near you then, perhaps, when you hear 'La Lisonjera.' Why not? Couldn't I inspire somebody to play it?"

"Oh, my darling, you could inspire anything."

"But you won't ever ask for it. And if I like your second wife *real* well," she lowered her tone, "I may let her play it once in a while and you will know I'm listening."

"And if I shouldn't get married—what's the matter with the pianola?" he retorted with an effort. "You might work the pianola. Say, let's go. If you keep on I shall have the jim-jams; honestly I shall. I can stand a good deal, but I'm not all cast iron. You're not going to die for a hundred years, my pet. You haven't begun to live yet. I mean to show you before you die what life is."

It was more than two months afterward with April opening rainy and shiny—soft sometimes and misty, then bleak again; but with the sense and promise of spring in the wind and the sun and the sky that a call

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reached Doctor Bryson over the telephone. When he got to the house Ruth was in her mother's arms. Her mother was bidding her good-bye—for a little while, she said. Mrs. Goddard was waiting to take Ruth to the North Side to spend the day with friends. But there was a strange wistfulness this time in the mother's kiss of good-bye, and little Ruth, all innocent of why mamma's eyes should brim to-day, left her just as Doctor Bryson came hastening in. He caught his wife's head close to his breast.

"I am afraid," she whispered. "I am afraid."

"No, no; you need not be."

"If I could see it would not seem so—so—terrible, Harry." She clutched his hands convulsively. "If it were not for you I should die of fear."

Ruth's voice came suddenly from below. "Good-bye, mamma!"

"Good-bye," answered her mother, starting up.

"I will bring you some flowers to-night when I come, mamma."

"Thank you, darling; good-bye."

The door bell rang at intervals during the morning. At noontime those in the house tiptoed about, and upstairs it was very quiet. At the table June tried to serve Mrs. Allison, but failed miserably and only sat and glared with a troubled look. So Mrs. Allison, helping herself to what was to be eaten, pretended she was eating—pretended to sip of her chocolate, but really only talked random-wise at June's unfleshed eyes and empty face.

The minutes with her of whom they spoke went slow: the hours went sometimes slow, sometimes

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fast, with a question brooding over her unanswered. Sometimes she called her husband's name, and he silently pressed her hand. Sometimes she asked if it was noon; and it was noon. Sometimes she asked if it was night; and at last it was night. Ruth came with her flowers for mamma, but they told her, whispering, to give them to Miss June and to eat supper quietly and to go up to Miss June's room to bed, because mamma was nervous and could not bear any noise.

"But mamma must hear my night prayers; she hears them every night," protested Ruth in alarm.

"You can say your prayers to me," snapped the venerable sceptic, tart with anxiety. But Ruth was not tart. She was meek and lamblike as June took her to the third floor. And so it came to pass that while her gentle petitions were breathed above, a babe was born into the world—a brother to the little girl that prayed—a child to her who suffered—a son to him who, while the infant wailed in the nurse's lap, kissed its mother's forehead.

"I thought"—he whispered, hushed with a new penitence, when at last her eyes opened, "I said brutally once that you did not know what love was; it was I who did not know," and the pressure of one weak hand gave love's forgiveness quick to his heart.

"You must go and rest now," she murmured.

"I rest?"

"It is late. Tell me who he looks like, Harry."

"As like you, my darling, as anything you ever saw—who should he look like?"

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"Put him beside me, nurse," she said, softly. "He is quiet now. I want to feel him on my arm."

It was eleven o'clock when the new picture was made. Doctor Bryson, leaving for the first time, went down to Julie's sleepy dinner, then, without undressing, threw himself on a couch in an adjoining room for the night. At daybreak, when the nurse touched his shoulder, he started with the quick perception that follows sleep after anxious strain.

"Mrs. Bryson wants to see you, doctor."

"What's the matter?" he demanded, throwing back his blanket.

"Nothing bad, I think; she wants to see you."

He hurried to her. In the east the sun rising out of the lake shot golden dawn under the partly drawn shades. As she lay, the early radiance rested on her face—a wan and girlish face now—such a face as comes out of suffering; suffering, that sometimes, like death, gives girlhood for a few hours back to womanhood. He saw on her face again the expression that had moved him the first time of all he ever had seen her—and it moved him again with a thrill of happiness. But was it only this that made her expression strangely sweet? her face all a-flutter of rapturous alarm? her baby again upon her arm and an arm stretched with speaking fingers toward her husband?

"Harry," she cried, faintly, "I can see."

He staggered. "What is it you say?"

"Kiss me, kiss your baby. Oh, there are lines in your face since I saw it, Harry—"

"Tell me, for God's sake, more."

"This morning," she fluttered, "I felt the daylight

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through my eyelids so strong, and baby woke crying and I opened my eyes—and saw his little face. That was the first thing I saw, right at my side. How could you say he looked like me, flatterer,” she faltered. “He is the picture of you.”

He hung faint upon her words, kissed her eyes, looked wondering into them, question and joy broken with thanksgiving. It came back as it had gone out, this light of her deep eyes, without warning they could read, without reason they could know. It was; it was not; and again it was—to crown at last the dear dignity of her wifehood and motherhood. That was a stormy day, the day that Master Harry little Bryson was one day old, and it was noised abroad that out of the mystery and into the world he had brought with him sight to his mother’s eyes.

“Why, John,” declared Bryson, with the frank abasement that put conviction behind all his words, “John,” he repeated, musing over the baby as he held it up for a first sight to his bewildered friend, “he’s a better man at the business this minute than I am. There’s nothing in the books that matches this. Here I’ve been studying the eye all my life, and he comes along and in six hours makes a cure that I’ve been worrying myself grayheaded over for a year. Shake hands with your uncle, kid. You’ll be giving everybody in this house points on ophthalmology before you’re a week old. Here, nurse; by Jove, he seems to be getting ready to tie himself up in a bowknot; take him, won’t you please?”

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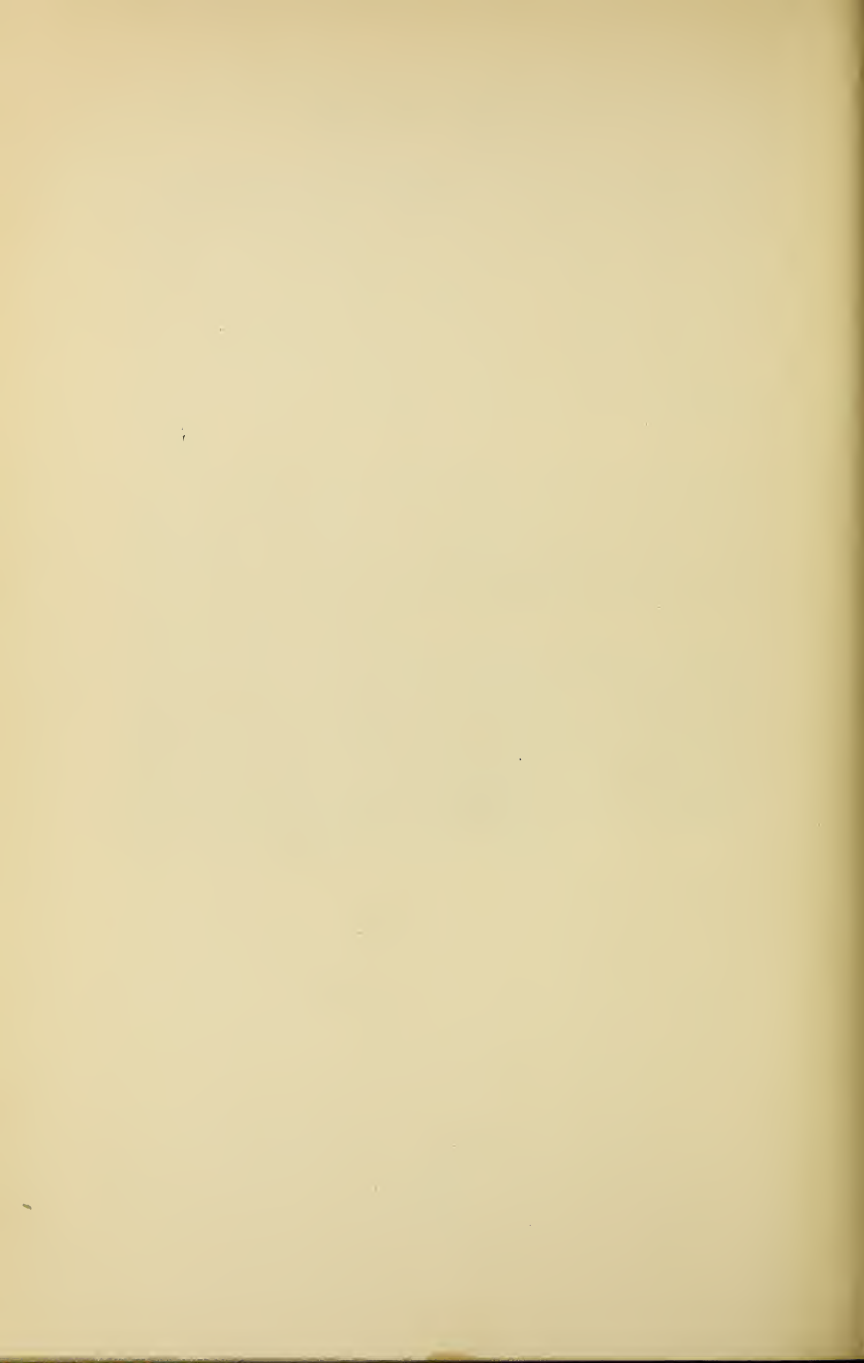
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A new house was opened that year in Kenwood with a baby boy for king. There is a sister princess there, Ruth, of eleven years, and to the monarch there are servitors, the chiefest a venerable maid, by courtesy aunt—Aunt June—who might in a regular way be called housekeeper; but her principal business is quarreling with Master Harry Bryson's nurse, who is disposed to enforce theories concerning his infantile habits.

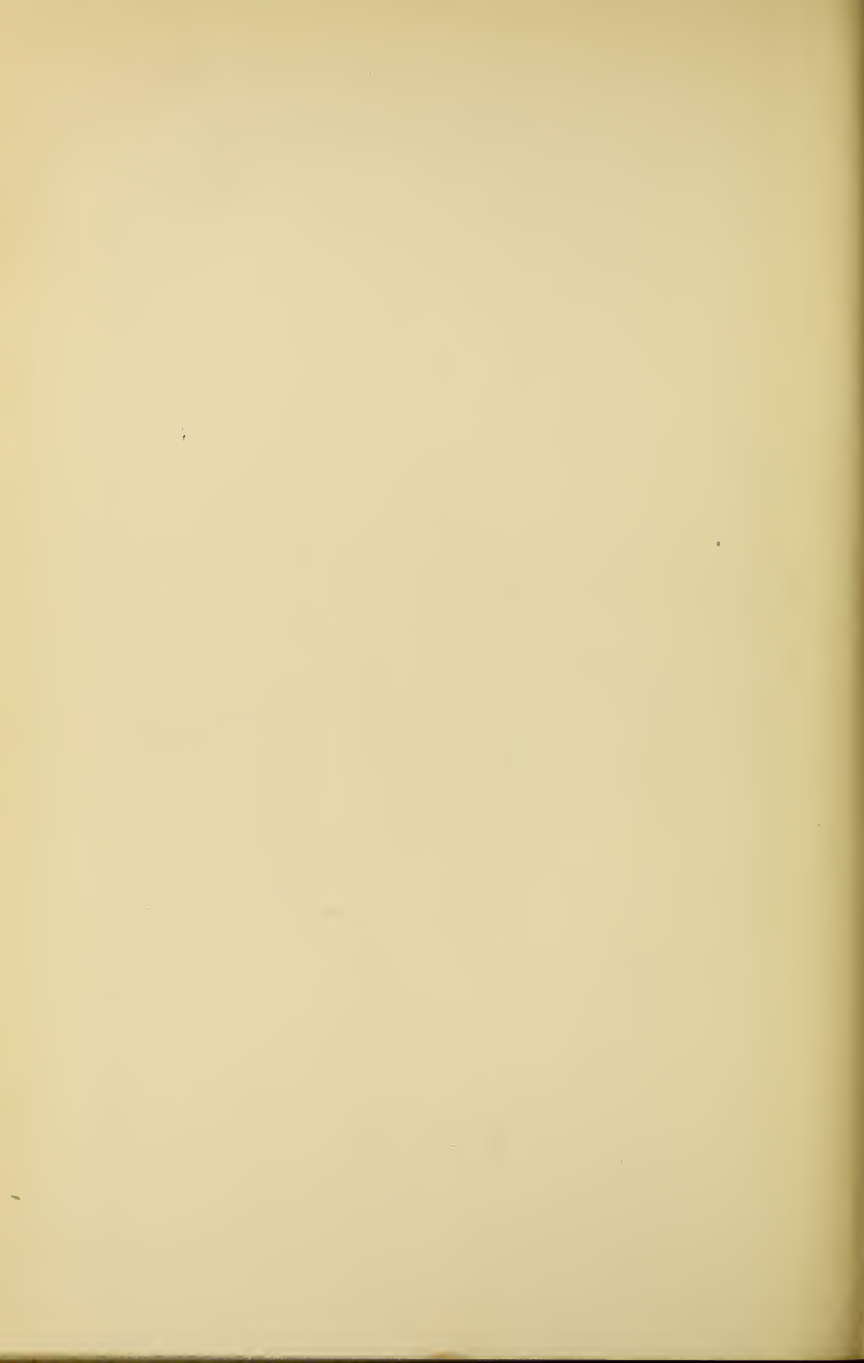
"You might just as well come and live with us," Doctor Bryson had said to June when the Allison's went to homekeeping. "I shall have to run your establishment, anyway; it's cheaper for me to have you here in the house and besides I don't have the worry of your staying out nights."

He is, they say, precisely the same Henry Elwood Bryson, M. D., Fellow and Member and everything, save for his very gray hair. But Mrs. Allison, who rather piques herself on being an authority on effects, holds that this is not unbecoming, not in the least; rather, it adds presence, she declares, to the youthfulness of the Dean of the Laffin faculty.



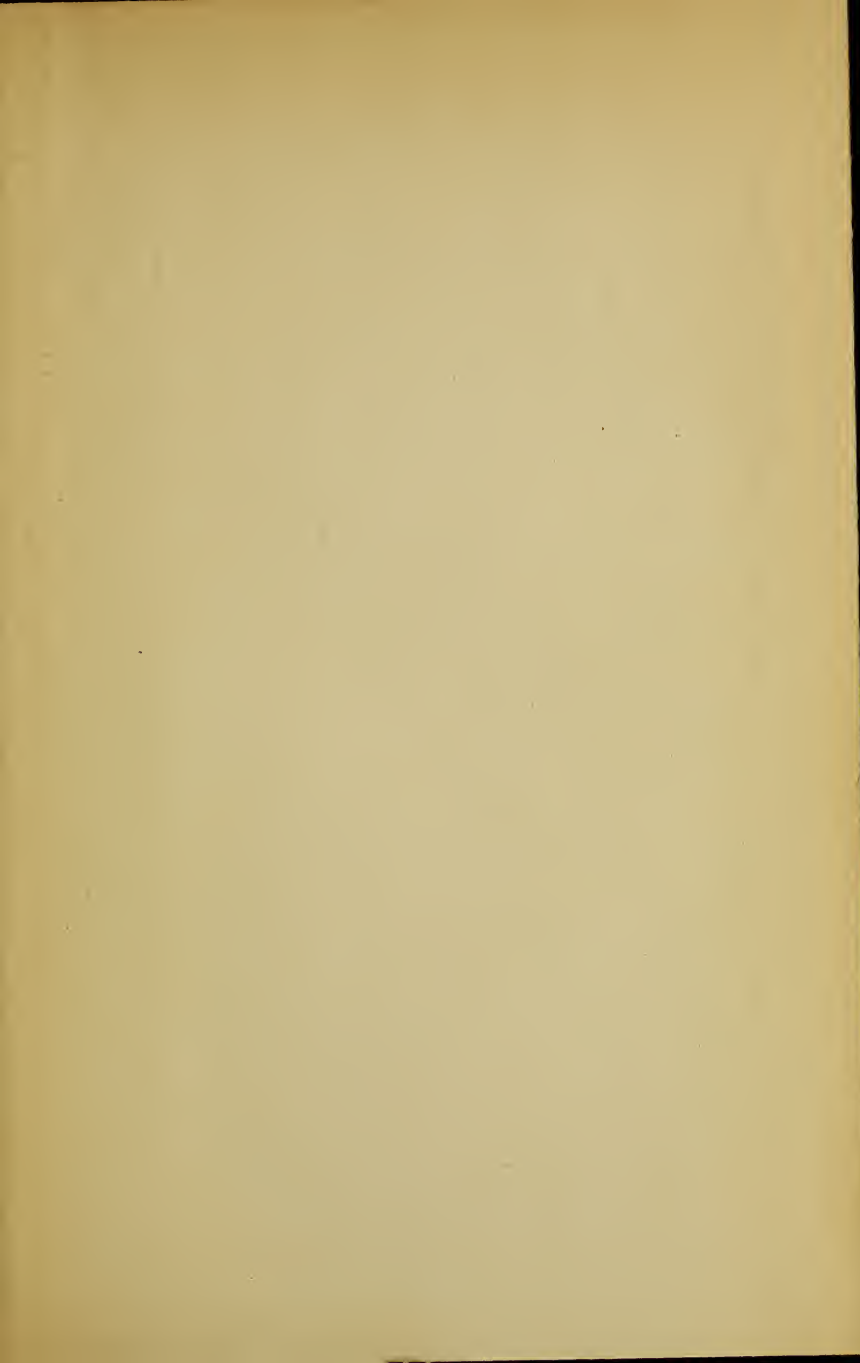


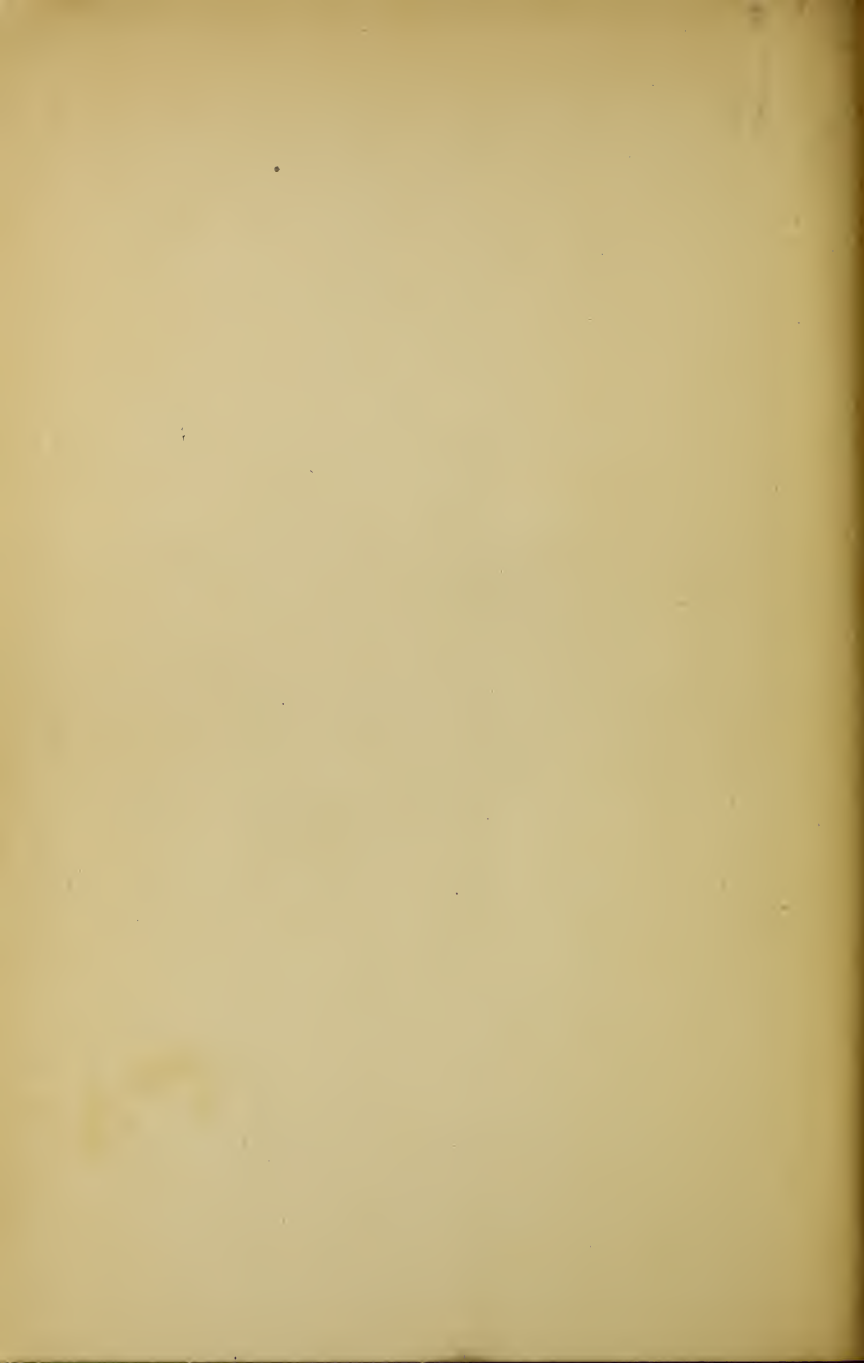












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